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Photograph by Alice Boughton

EDITH WYNNE MATTHISON AS DIANA

THE RIB OF THE MAN

A PLAY OF THE NEW WORLD IN FIVE ACTS
SCENE INDIVIDABLE, SETTING FORTH THE STORY
OF AN AFTERNOON IN THE FULNESS OF DAYS

BY

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

*Nῦν δὲ γυναικῶν φύλον ἀείσατε, ἡδὺνέπειαι
Μοῦσαι Ὁλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι.*

—Hesiod Theogony 1021



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My

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TO MY WIFE AND
ALL MY BELOVED WOMEN

"I know we are on the threshold of the Great Miracle. A New World, so far as the relation between man and woman is concerned. A world of less sex and more love. There shall be real children in that world. Children with wings maybe: children of the open sky: maybe at last some Golden Child quickened of the Wind Himself!"

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THE RIB OF THE MAN

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

DAVID FLEMING	An image of God	THE MAN
ROSIE FLEMING	An help meet for him	THE RIB
ARCHIE LEGGE	A gentleman	A BEAST OF THE EARTH
BASIL MARTIN	An aviator	A FOWL OF THE AIR
PETER PROUT	A scientist	THE SUBTLE ONE
ION	A gardener	THE VOICE WALKING
DIANA BRAND	A spare rib	THE FLAMING SWORD

THE PLACE

THE COURTYARD of a villa overlooking the sea,
on an island of the *Ægean*. The name is EDEN.

THE TIME

Between the hours of five and half past seven on
an afternoon during the European War.

THE SCENE

It is the COURTYARD of a villa overlooking the sea, on an island of the *Æ*gean. The stonework is marble, square-blocked without ornament and the colour of honey.

The VILLA is to the left:¹ the upper story, a loggia with stairway descending sidelong to the yard: the lower, yawning into cellarage. On the right are COLUMNS, CYPRESS TREES and a glimpse of GARDEN. A TERRACE, approached by STEPS and bounded by a low WALL, occupies the background. The wall is recessed for a seat. Beyond are cedar branches and a blue sky.

A plot of lawn carpets the YARD. A couple of classic benches stand formally right and left. In the centre upon a plain modern base, an ancient ALTAR. It is a tripod of Egyptian porphyry, scarred with age, but glowing like a flame of rose. The inscription in Greek uncials below,

THI TΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ ΜΗΤΡΙ

points to a worship that goes back beyond all bibles to the foundations of the world.

¹The directions, Right and Left, throughout the play, refer to the spectator's point of view.

THE GREEK SONG

The first and last stanzas of Sappho's HYMN TO APHRODITE, sung in Greek to Brahms' *Sapphische Ode*, are used throughout the play. They run:

ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαι σε,
μή μ' ἄσαισι μητ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θῦμον.

Ἐλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμος ἴμμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὖτα
σύμμαχος ἔσ-

Immortal Aphrodite of the broidered throne,
daughter of Zeus, weaver of wiles, I pray thee,
break not my spirit with anguish and distress,
O Queen.

Come, I pray thee, now too, and release me from
cruel cares; and all that my heart desires to accom-
plish, accomplish thou, and be thyself my ally.
(Wharton).

The Curtain rises and descends each time to
phrases from the same melody, arranged for the
orchestra.

THE FIRST ACT

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE

THE RIB OF THE MAN

THE FIRST ACT

In the beginning there is shewn an Ancient Gardener, busy with a besom. He wears a saffron smock, his brown legs bare but sandalled. It is ION. As he works he croons a song in Greek.

He breaks off suddenly, diverted by some happening in the garden; and PETER PROUT crawls in. A queer old party with a flat head, and clad in silver grey.

PETER is equipped with entomological tackle and has caught something. He now wriggles pleasantly upon the altar, nipping its thorax.

PROUT. I get old and stiff as sin. But I still bag beauties. Sss! A fine fat female.

He stabs her neatly with a pin: then, looking up, catches ION's eye.

Krr!

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ION. What for, you murder my dear butterfly?

PROUT. My good sir, science! Surely a little blood-shed in the sacred cause of science . . . Ah!—You don't know who I am. Nobody ever does at first. No matter! *Prout!* I repeat, sir, *Prout!* *Peter Prout!*

ION. Is it a joke?

PROUT. Joke! I'm introducing myself. Do I strike savagery, where the name of Prout is nothing?

ION. Forgive! It is a foolish island. Here we live thousand of year ago, all day long.

PROUT. This is the penalty of incognito. If I went about, the roaring lion, devouring their indigestible dinners, I'd be welcome as the devil. I come, a simple old soul with a butterfly net, and I'm a joke. Let me tell you, sir, there's more behind this net than—butterflying! It is the symbol of a craft that tangles Life herself. She can't fool me. I know her secret.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ION. I am Greek: I like a secret. Tell me.

And he settles coaxingly at his feet.

PROUT. Sex. The fact may not have pierced your island gloom, but PROUT ON SEX denotes the final word. In that book, I expose all. I investigate amatory impulse from its mild beatitudes in primordial mud to the compositions of Matisse. What do I find? Sex! I find sex in everything, and I do not shrink from saying so. Little of the modest violet about me, sir! I'm biological or nothing.

ION. Ah, now you are talking Greek: I understand. I study life too, here in my garden.

PROUT. Bless my bones! . . . And I mistook you for an oriental mystic!

He slips down for a hobnob.

ION. Have a bit of fig?

PROUT. Krr! Mine's smoke.

Their rituals occupy them a moment.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ION. You are a wise man. How of a case like so?

You are only the old fool in the garden. You go about, you dig, you plant; but you are like God—you are deaf: so we talk aloud. All the same, your big ear, it is wide open, and one day, down by the Tree We Must Not Pick, you learn—a Secret! Next, you think to help a bit: so you write and tell. And now already, she is back in the villa; and in a jiff, Mrs. Fleming will be here too.

PROUT. I see sex in this already. Proceed.

ION. Your Beautiful Moon, she is upstair, changing herself of the voyage. Not a soul know she is come. Mrs. Fleming, she is down at the Kafenia, turkey-dancing for the Red Cross. It is when they meet, you bad old man, you will find what you have done. Only, it is not *you*. It is *me* all the time, see? So!

PROUT. From your disorganized data, I infer: two females in antagonism. Yes?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ION. *Antagonisma!* They do not meet for three year.

PROUT. Sss! I thought the one bright instinct of my life could not deceive me. Who is the man?

ION. I did not say a man. Do you mean Mr. Fleming? Or one of the others?

PROUT. Others! What!—Polyandry?

ION. Not so very poly. It is only four of us who are men, counting *me*.

PROUT. Ample, sir, for polyandric purposes! I must contrive some way of sticking on here.

ION. That will make five. [*Counting*]; You and me: Captain Martin from the big war: Mr. Legge, who is always come amusing Mrs. Fleming; and . . . Ah!—Mr. Fleming.

PROUT (*glittering*). Bit of a mole, eh?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ION. What you call *archaiologos*, yes. He goes all day digging for pots and palaces under the ground.

PROUT. The archæological husband!—Sss! . . . Now, listen. Can't have everybody meddling in this problem. Polyandry means mine! Don't you get shoving in your oar; and I'll shew you how we practise science down—my way.

ION. You will do all this for love of me?

PROUT. Certainly not, sir! My devotion is purely psychoanalytical.

ION. Oh! That is all right then.

He begins moving away.

PROUT. One moment! That Secret, down by the Tree. . . ?

ION. Ah, that I do not tell. I leave it for your so-clever net to tangle.

PROUT. Krr!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ION, blithely warbling, pads to the terrace. There he meets ROSIE FLEMING. She is a pretty thing in pink with a parasol.

PROUT's angry rattle changes to a pleased hiss.

ROSIE. Ion, do stop howling. Is Mr. Legge here?

ION. It is a wonderful thing, I have to tell! Already, my Beautiful Moon . . .

ROSIE (*shooing him down*). I really can't bother listening to one of your long-winded Greek myths this hot afternoon. I'm far too cross. Hasn't anybody come? Ion! Oh!

For he has resumed his melody. She prods him with her parasol. He rubs the place ruefully and stops.

Deaf old nuisance! . .

Suddenly her face wreathes in smiles. She has spied the hat of a man. She tiptoes playfully down to the altar;

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Archie Legge, you naughty boy! . . .

Only to find PROUT basking there.

I beg your pardon. I mistook you for a friend.

PROUT. No mistake, ma'am, I am. Every woman's friend. Professor Prout. Prout of PROUT ON SEX.

Rosie. No really, how charming! Of course, you've come to see the Altar. My husband's excavating, but I'm *Mrs.* Fleming. Pray don't move, if you're cosy. My friend, the one I thought you were, adores that place. Goodness knows why!—It's the hottest spot in the *Æ*gean.

PROUT. Thankee, ma'am, I'm like your friend: I adore hot spots. What's the jigamaree?

Rosie. The Altar! My husband's famous discovery! Isn't that why you came?

PROUT. Not precisely. I just happened this way.
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in pursuit of a fine female butterfly. Then too, the delightful associations of the name, EDEN, on the gate-post, naturally. . . . And here I am.

ROSIE. Fancy not knowing David's altar! It's thousands of years old—five or fifty, I never quite remember. The scholars rave over it. It *is* rather jolly, that spot of rich warm colour, in the middle of all this chilly marble. Decorative, don't you think? The Greek at the back of your legs will tell you what it's all about, if you read the wiggly stuff. I don't!

PROUT. Greek! I'm afraid my eyes. . . . Moreover, upside down. . . .

ROSIE. Please don't get apoplexy: I've mastered the translation. Lord, I've heard nothing else for three dreary years! To THE MOTHER OF THE GODS.

PROUT: Mother! There again! Sss! . . .

ROSIE. Yes, rather sweet! Think of those be-

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nighted pagans having a perfectly ducky idea like that!

PROUT. Yes, ma'am, it's curious how all these outworn anthropomorphic symbols keep on harping . . .

He is interrupted by ION squatting on the lawn beside him, to plait bines.

ION. Now I make a basket for the figs I bring her.

PROUT. Krr! Harping . . .

ION. Three year! A long time to be without a fig!

ROSIE. Please don't take any notice. It encourages him. We have to endure him, because this is the one decent rentable villa on the island, and it's his. But the restrictions! . . . There! Even to fruit-trees! Simply, I suppose, because in the first idiocy of my honeymoon, I christened

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the place, EDEN. Selfishness, that's the trouble! Just plain piggish masculine selfishness and lunacy!

PROUT (*sotto voce*). Lunacy! And he led me to suppose he was a biologist!

ROSIE. He's always pretending to be something silly. And you needn't lower your voice. There is that blessing. He's stone deaf.

PROUT. Deaf! . . .

He turns suspiciously, but ION is contemplating hidden things.

ION. My Moon, they shall know her by the lovely song of Sappho.

ROSIE. There! Everlastingly chattering! See, what was I . . .

PROUT. The altar, ma'am. Its pregnant dedication.

ROSIE. Exactly! My husband has written a huge book about it. I haven't read it myself;

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but it's fearfully clever. I grant, poor dear Papa did actually *find* the altar and, Heaven knows, left papers enough littering the house; but what I always say is, *David wrote the book!* The recognition it has won him, you wouldn't believe! Naturally, I helped. A woman can do so much, don't you think? I don't mean in a horrid public way; but in the home, among friends, everywhere, just quietly pushing, hm? What *is* the good of knowing people, if you can't use them? I'm afraid I'm only very old-fashioned. Oddly enough, David's book is all about that kind of woman. It is called, THE RIB. You don't mind me going on with my knitting, do you?

She fishes it out of her pink bag.

PROUT. Talking of ribs, ma'am, strange thing; but on the very first page of PROUT ON SEX . . .

ROSIE. No really, how delightful! We are all making trotty little comforters for the poor

THE RIB OF THE MAN

fellows at the front. Isn't this war terrible? The royal families, how they must suffer: all related, you know! We have one staying with us now—a soldier, not a royalty—Basil Martin, the aviator. You must have read about him in the papers. Well, after that perfectly thrilling event up in the clouds, he came down here to convalesce. An awfully decent sort and frightfully brave; but just a weeny bit stand-offish!—Pity, isn't it? Men are so scarce in this wilderness.

PROUT. Not so very poly! Ah! . . .

ROSIE. Yes, you're going to scold me for a naughty little flirt, I know! . . .

She favors him with her pet pout;

Everybody scolds me nowadays! Simply because I like nice men friends, instead of a lot of stuffy women. I don't care! . . .

Look! Isn't that darling?

She lets her knitting at him, a long limp reptile of uncoiling wools. He

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takes the end, wraps it round his arm and plays with it as though it were some live thing.

I have a friend, a dear ridiculous old maid who does everything. She started it for me. I'm only in my first row myself; but funny old Tilly did all this! Doesn't it prove what I was saying? Woman can do so much. To help, I mean.

PROUT. You mentioned flirtation. On that point, I . . .

ROSIE. My idea, absolutely. Ah, if only women would realise the influence they have in their hands already! After all, men merely want managing! But all this unwomanly publicity and unkindness to policemen! Surely, Home does mean something, or whatever was the use of writing the song? Indelicacy, that's the trouble! And I think they ought to be stopped!

PROUT. Touching flirtation, neurosis reveals. . . . Krr!

It is Ion again, with a burst of song.
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ROSIE. Ion! Ion! Oh, please poke him in the back with your net!

Which PROUT does. ION rewards him with a face of beaming brotherhood.

ION. How do you do? Yes, I am here. I do not put in the oar, once!

ROSIE. Please go on. Don't let him keep on rudely interrupting you.

PROUT. What I wanted to say was this. You wrong me by supposing I disapprove of what you call—flirtation. Indeed, I claim I may be styled flirtation's paramount apostle! . . .

She wags a finger at him, signifying “Naughty!”; but he hisses her down;

Yes, madam, a perusal of my book would show my viewpoint is most liberal. I maintain flirtation is a practice sanctioned

THE RIB OF THE MAN

by every high and hallowed biologic principle. Take now, the example of the female stickleback . . .

ION. There is that drat telegram-boy, again at my fig-tree! *Ai!* You Turk, wait till I come hold of you!

And he fusses off into the garden.

ROSIE. There, you see! That tree again! Selfish old . . .

So nice, meeting you! You can't imagine how refreshing it is, having a dear old gentleman to talk to, after a pack of tiresome boys.

PROUT. Nothing more natural! Indeed, in this very instance of the stickleback . . .

ROSIE. Older men are so much more—more . . .

PROUT. Unquestionably! When the flamboyant male of that affectionate little fish . . .

ROSIE. These sudden intimacies! Sometimes I think they mean we may have met before.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Perhaps in some other world. Some better world! . . .

And so you have written a nice naughty old book all about flirtation!

He drops his stickleback at once;

PROUT. Yes, ma'am, yes: in the *larger* sense, yes!

Of course, when we say flirtation, there is flirtation and flirtation. We mean—flirtation.

ROSIE. My way of thinking, exactly! You put it all so clearly!

PROUT. You appreciate clarity?—Ah, you should see my book! There's clarity for you—clarity and naked truth! Madam, you shall see it! I have one here in my knapsack: several! I disseminate them wherever I'm—permitted.

He begins fumbling at the knapsack.

ROSIE. Really, I don't deserve . . .

PROUT. Madam, you do; but you don't know why. I will tell you why. It is because you are

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the problem I have been seeking all my life. I have found you down among the spiders, the anthropoids, the Himalayan Kulus; but never before as high as this. Mrs. Fleming, congratulations! Already I behold in you my next experiment. Scientifically you are mine. To express myself with radiant perspicuity: *I know all!*

ROSIE (*weakly*). All! About what?

PROUT. You. The other problem, the problem of the Beautiful Moon up yonder . . .

He points to the villa. She gapes bewilderedly at the heavens.

. . . I do not yet profess to fathom. It is you only, courageous female! And I applaud you for it.

ROSIE. Then for mercy's sake, you fascinating mysterious old thing, explain.

PROUT. I will; and in one word. Hitherto we have employed the empty euphemism, Flirtation. What of—Polyandry?

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ROSIE. Polly—what?

PROUT. *Andry.* Comes from the Greek, *anēr*.

ROSIE. Never heard of the place. Nor the lady.

PROUT (*scribbling*). There, ma'am, PROUT ON SEX, the fruit of all my knowledge, autographed. It represents the happy labours of a lifetime. Take it, digest it and become wise.

ROSIE. How perfectly heavenly of you! I'll . . .

She skims rapidly through the pages;

I'll put it with David's and my dear Papa's!

PROUT. Ah!—Heredity! Who was Papa?

ROSIE. Why, you don't seem to know anything about us! Papa was Dr. Brand. Erasmus Brand.

PROUT. What, the great Brand? Brand that found the famous phallic . . .

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ROSIE. Absolutely!

PROUT. So that's where I am! Talk of coincidences! And of course, you were the young girl! Not a day older, positively! Amazing! . . .

So you *did* marry the man?

ROSIE. Whatever are you trying to say?

PROUT. Why, I've been here before. Fact! I can recall distinctly every single . . .

No! There wasn't an altar.

ROSIE. Then you never saw me! That thing's been stuck there, ever since I came.

PROUT. How long ago?

ROSIE. Three years.

PROUT. Nonsense! My book's older than that!

ROSIE. I think I ought to remember the year when David and I were married!

PROUT. Very man, I mean. Brand's assistant.

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Bristly moustache. Fellow with a pick-axe, always jabbering Greek with you.

ROSIE. But I don't know Greek!

PROUT. Archæology, then. Weren't you and he constantly . . .

ROSIE. No!

PROUT. Then I'm . . .

No, I'm not! There *was* a girl. And I'll swear Brand said his daughter.

ROSIE. That was my sister. And I don't want to talk about her, please!

PROUT. Ah! . . .

Just one little point. Her name?

ROSIE (*snapping*). Diana!

PROUT. The Beautiful Moon! Ah! . . .

Sss! . . .

Something is happening in the background. A head bobs up. Then a

THE RIB OF THE MAN

body. It is ARCHIE LEGGE climbing over the wall.

LEGGE. Hello, Rosie! Guess what! Such a lark!

ROSIE. Archie, I do think, when there's a gate . . .

He turns back to chaff someone below.

LEGGE. What about it, dear old chap? Haw! . . . You know, he's overdoing this wounded warrior game. Bally old newspapers have made him dotty.

ROSIE. Oh, dear! Captain Martin coming?

LEGGE. That's the joke. Too jolly slow for me, limping the long way round with him. Know what I did? Laid five drachmas, me handicapped, you the goal. Silly cuckoo took me, started; and I shinned the wall. That's what I call sport.

*He then alights, pulls his tie, and joins
ROSIE. He is pimply, forty, and the
latest thing in "summer suitings"!*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. You're horrid; and I'm angry anyway!
Why didn't you turn up at the Kafenia?

LEGGE. I say though, you look spiffing! And no
beastly people about. You and me alone,
what! . . .

She restrains his approach, pantomiming frantically.

Where? . . .

PROUT. Here! She means me.

And he waggles his net over the altar.

LEGGE. The deuce!

ROSIE. Yes, my new friend! We only met a
moment ago, but it seems ages! Archie
Legge: Professor . . .

She takes a peep at the book.

PROUT (*rasping*). Prout!

LEGGE. Haw!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

PROUT. Sss!

ROSIE. The professor has given me a copy of his enchanting book! Sweet, isn't it?

LEGGE (*taking it*). Ripping! . . .

I say though, really! Sex, you know!

PROUT. I'll slip away quietly!—No, don't insist! Perhaps tonight at your simple family dinner. . . . Meanwhile, don't mind me crawling around your cellarage, eh? Nice and dark! And there's a parasitic male rejoicing in such places, whose polygamous enthusiasms . . .

And he vanishes in a whistle of sibilants.

ROSIE. Ugh! I'm bored stiff! Here have I been making myself utterly killing, thinking that old grub might be somebody; and he's only an author!

LEGGE. Really though, the bounder, giving you a thing like this! Not even as if he knew you!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*He gravitates to the spot he adores,
and opens the book.*

'Pon my word! Very thing, I've been
saying all summer! Haw!

And he plunges into PROUT.

ROSIE. Well, I do think, considering this afternoon,
instead of reading that silly book . . .

LEGGE. Haw! Rotten old rip!

ROSIE. Archie!

LEGGE. Hello, did you speak? I say, Rosie, listen
to this. My philosophy to a T! . . .
What's up now?

ROSIE. Oh, friends, friends!

LEGGE. What's the matter with friends?

ROSIE. Matter! They're every bit as vile and sel-
fish as—husbands!

LEGGE. Rosie, don't say a frightful thing like that!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Well, why didn't you turn up at the Kafenia, as you promised? You know the only happiness I have in the world is turkey-trotting! Yes, I know it's out of date; but some of us must stand for the beautiful old ideals!

She fiddles about for a handkerchief.

LEGGE. Fact is, little woman . . .

ROSIE. I did expect my own pals to support me! There I stood like a stuck doll, waiting to score off all those stiff Greek frumps; and the place a hideous vacuum! And it was for charity! Then you, instead of being sorry, sit reading footling books; and he's invited himself to dinner! I'm so broken-hearted, I vow I'll never, never trot again!

And she melts into tears.

LEGGE. Come now, that's sheer recklessness! Little girl, be chippy!

But she is comfortless. He makes a book-mark of a blade of grass: then goes to her.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Dear child, do think of me! Only a man!
Woman weeping, don't you know! Gets
me here!

He blinks and tugs at his collar.

Haw! Baby . . .

ROSIE. I hate you! Go away!

He does; and sits, a little huffed.

LEGGE. That's what one gets! If you knew what I'd gone through today!—Troubles, my Lord! And there's a bit here I wanted to read you about turkeys: only, of course, now . . .

Enough to make a fellow do something desperate! Put an end to it all!

ROSIE (*roused*). Archie, you would never dare!

LEGGE. Don't know! Thought of it only this morning. Shaving!

The horror fascinates her. She stares.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Something's wrong with the whole world, it seems! First the war with its miseries. And now this.

She looks at him; but he is lost in the amorous transports of the barnyard. She goes and touches him. He jumps.

Boy, I'm sorry!

He grunts, and holds the passage with a finger.

As for my wicked vow, I didn't mean it. I never do mean anything. What, sever the one precious bond that links our loneliness? No, Archie: some things are too sacred! Turkey-trotting's one of them. Twinkle's another.

He suffers her to share his lowly seat.

Why are you so unhappy?

LEGGE. Unhappy, what!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. No-one is happy, contemplating suicide. Besides, I see it in your face. The moment you bite your lip, I know it means you're suffering. Instinct, I suppose! That's what women are for—to have instinct and help the unhappy. Ah, how true that is!

He blinks and bites simultaneously.

Won't you tell me, Archie?

LEGGE. Well, there is—something. Worrying all day! 'Pon my life, these women! . . .

ROSIE (*cooing*). Ye-es? We're getting on very nicely!

She waits expectantly. He looks at his nails: then answers;

LEGGE. Same old thing! Always the same old thing! Another letter from—Her!

ROSIE. From your wife? Oh! Poor Archie!

LEGGE. Knew you'd pity me. Thanks, little woman.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*He marks the book, and they clasp
hands there by the altar. Present-
ly, she falters with infinite delicacy;*

ROSIE. Wouldn't you like to show me the letter?

LEGGE. Rosie, I wouldn't for the world! She's as unsympathetic as a fish! Oh, these fishy women! And with a man like me too, all sunny warmth and love!

ROSIE. I know, I know! Ah, how well, I know!

LEGGE. Imagine! Wants me to go home now!
Home!

And he laughs most hollowly.

ROSIE. Horrible!

LEGGE. And sarcastic! Listen to this! . . .

He rips the letter from his pocket.

*It's quite safe now: the war's nearly over.
There's marrying one of these unsexed*
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THE RIB OF THE MAN

literary women!—Always so darned sarcastic! *Do you ever remember you're a father?* Me, mind you, who can't speak of Billyboy without lumps in my throat! Poor little chap! Then a lot of drivel about *philandering in the Archipelago!*—meaning, of course, you! Doesn't that shew you what Georgina is?

ROSIE. It all seems so awful! A life like yours, spoiled by such a heartless creature!

LEGGE. Just what I say! By Jove, if only someone—someone different, someone more like you . . .

ROSIE (*very gently*). I know what you would say, but it was not to be. Only, I have helped a little, Archie? Perhaps our beautiful friendship has not been wholly wasted!

LEGGE. No, not wasted. Bit wobbly! Rosie! I say though really, Rosie—you and me, don't you know—eh, what? . . .

His passion shakes her for the moment. Then she answers steadily;

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THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. I will be your sister, Archie. Try and bear it. However it hurts.

LEGGE. I have a sister. She's worse than Georgina.

ROSIE. These strange sweet intimacies! Perhaps they mean we may have met before. In some other world.

LEGGE. Jolly sure of it, if you ask me. Anyway, that explains the Kafenia. Fellow can't very well turkey-trot with a woman like you, and *this* in his pocket.

He rams the letter back again.

Knew you'd worm it somehow. Now you know all.

ROSIE. *I know all!* What does that phrase. . . Ah! Archie, do you happen to know a woman of the name of Polly?

ARCHIE evidently does.

LEGGE. Well, of all the caddish. . . . That's Martin! I thought some pure-minded, backbiting . . . Polly who?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. I'm not sure of the surname. Sounded rather French. But I'm positive about Polly.

LEGGE. Martin, I'll swear! Catch me telling him anything again! There's military honour for you! Yes, and that's how Georgina came to know about you! Captain Basil Martin, eh? Of all the sneaking, crawling . . .

ION bursts in with a telegram for ROSIE.

ION. Oh, that bad boy, how I grab him off my tree! There! It is the telegram that did not come. The cable, it was cut by the big war, and it is all a day ago late. And my Moon, she will rise, and not a fig in the basket! Oh, the Turk!

And snatching up his basket, he trots back into the garden.

ROSIE. Now *did* you gather a single word, he said?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Lot of Greek gabble, no! It's that fellow Martin, I'm after!

*And as ROSIE opens her telegram,
BASIL MARTIN limps in from the
garden. He is in white mufti, his
left arm slinged.*

BASIL. Don't worry, I'm here.

*He drops five drachmas into his hand.
LEGGE pockets them.*

Legge, you have all the delicate instincts of a millionaire.

LEGGE. Come up by aeroplane? Bit slippy for the wounded hero, aren't you?

BASIL. Still solicitous about my wounds, dear boy? You know I'm only foxing.

ROSIE. Oh! . . .

She has read the telegram, and now gazes blankly into space.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL. Hello! Bad news?

ROSIE. Devastating! My sister is coming back.
Tomorrow.

BASIL. Diana! Impossible!

ROSIE (*reading*). *Arriving five tomorrow: Diana.*

BASIL. How can she tomorrow, when the only
boat . . .

*She hands him the telegram. He
studies it very carefully.*

Ion said anything?

ROSIE. Ion! He's done nothing all afternoon, but
sing silly songs and rave about the moon.

BASIL (*slowly*). Singing again, is he? What's he
up to now?

LEGGE. Picking figs.

*This interests BASIL. He glances up at
the villa: then returns the telegram.*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL. Thanks. Let me see, Diana's been gone three years. She skidaddled just . . .

ROSIE (*bridling*). Just before my marriage!

BASIL. We're both egotists, Mrs. Fleming! I was about to say, just after I left for Central Africa.

ROSIE. I really don't see what *you* had to do with her going!

BASIL. That's true. We were great enemies. She never did love soldiers.

LEGGE. Course, I'm only recent! Can't pretend to Martin's footing with the family! Positively first time I heard you *had* a sister! But if she's anything like you . . .

ROSIE. But she isn't, she isn't! There's the tragedy! That's why I never mentioned her. Oh, the shame, the unutterable shame, the degradation!

LEGGE. I say though, bit thick! Not really!

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ROSIE. Absolutely! I've tried to hide it for three long miserable years! What's the use? Archie! My sister is—Diana Brand!

LEGGE. Diana Brand! Your sister!

BASIL. Well, what the everlasting blazes, if she is?

ROSIE. Captain Martin!

LEGGE. Yes, Martin!

ROSIE. Is it possible, you never heard?

LEGGE. Did you never read the newspapers?

BASIL. How could I, you ass? I was busy dodging lions in the jungle.

ROSIE. Since your return! Didn't they tell you, on the battlefield?

BASIL. How could they—Mrs. Fleming? I was busy dodging shrapnel in the welkin.

LEGGE. Don't you know of the policemen?

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ROSIE. The trial, the imprisonment?

LEGGE. The things she's said, the things she's done?

ROSIE. The thing she is!

BASIL. Good God, no! What?

ROSIE - (together). A suffragette!
LEGGE

BASIL *takes this very quietly.*

BASIL. Good old Diana! Down to bed-rock militancy at last. Of course, I knew her interest in the movement, but—Policemen!

Tell me, when did this—terrible possession first afflict her?

ROSIE. There's the mystery!—The very moment I announced my engagement. Jealousy, I suppose! After all, with so few men to go round, there must be some old maids, and why not Diana? So selfish! But there she was! Bounced out of the house—Hadn't even the decency to wait for the

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wedding!—and began rampaging at once, all over the world.

BASIL. Humph!

LEGGE. Votes for Women, don't you know. All that tosh!

BASIL. Ah!

ROSIE. Heaven knows, I'm not one to speak ill of the dead; but poor dear Papa was so foolish! Taught her Greek and gadding about and all kinds of unwomanly things. Why, she'd even go digging with him and David and the men! Improper, I call it! No wonder she couldn't get a husband! And her dress! . . . Well!—practically trousers! I suppose that's how it all began.

BASIL. Yes, I see the trousers! And there was that jolly Greek thing she wore in the afternoon. Blue, I remember, like her eyes! It would be just about this time. The day's digging was over, and she'd trot

THE RIB OF THE MAN

upstairs to change. Then presently, we'd hear the beautiful Hymn to Aphrodite—Sappho's very own, to Brahms' music! And that was the signal for Ion, with figs from the garden.

LEGGE. My word! Poetical!

BASIL. Why not? Diana's a pretty fine woman.

LEGGE (*interested*). No—really?

BASIL. Oh, quite! Only—Legge! It isn't safe to tell her so, until you know her a bit!

ROSIE. Everyone to his taste, Captain Martin! I hope you won't be disappointed this time tomorrow, when Diana comes swaggering out here in knickerbockers!

BASIL. Mrs. Fleming, I'd endure her in a fillibeg!

*The voices of DAVID FLEMING and
PROUT are heard in the cellar.*

DAVID. What the Hades! . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. That's David!

PROUT. Don't apologize, sir! Step right over me! Simply a little enquiry into the ways of a worm!

DAVID. Wriggling down there on your stomach!

And he emerges in muddy khaki and gaiters, bearing a pickaxe. He is a handsome, irritable-looking man, moustached, with imperious eyes.

Well, another prodigious victory! Something to make old Evans and the whole cabal of them turn green with envy! Guess what I've struck! A regular crockery shop! Minoan goddesses by the score! And a bull to . . .

ROSIE. David, this is no time for archæological disquisitions! I have something awful to tell you! How shall I begin? It's tomorrow! Tomorrow afternoon, at this very hour . . .

A woman's voice floats out from the villa, singing the Hymn to Aphrodite. They all stand spellbound.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. My God!

And a moment later, collects himself.

LEGGE. How ripping! Who is it?

Nobody answers. The voice comes nearer.

'Pon my word, that's what I call . . .

He mounts the terrace, craning his neck towards the sound.

ION enters with the basket of figs.

ION. The fig, they are gathered; the clouds, they are passing away; the moon, she is rising! Diana! Diana! My Beautiful Moon!

And DIANA BRAND steps from the loggia. She is dressed in a classic chiton of delicate blue. Her song breaks off.

DIANA. Of all the glorious surprises! Back already! Ion said, not till six!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Ion! . . .

DIANA runs down the stairway, and clasps ROSIE to her heart, half weeping.

DIANA. Rosie, darling! Oh, my dear, my dear, I've been a devil to you!

ROSIE. *Ion* said! . . .

DIANA. Why, it's quite a party! Splendid! And where is. . . . Oh!

DAVID is by the cellar. She faces him.

DAVID (*gruffly*). Well, Diana! Good crossing?

DIANA. Excellent, thank you, David. Bit choppy, this end.

DAVID. Ah!

DIANA. And upon my word, the bitter enemy of my youth! This *is* a reunion! What

THE RIB OF THE MAN

quarrels we shall have! Still fighting,
Basil?

He is by the garden. They join hands.

BASIL. Not this moment, Diana. And you?

DIANA. Oh, you poor dear, I didn't. . . . Anything very . . .

BASIL. Just a fall.

DIANA. You mean . . .

BASIL. Yes: like Lucifer's. And you?

He watches her whimsically, as she turns to Ion.

DIANA. And Ion with the figs! I knew you would!
Ion, you darling, I must kiss you!

ION. Yes!

Rosie, disgusted, joins Legge. At the same time, Prout pops out from the cellar.

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PROUT. Peculiar thing; but love among the worms . . .

He observes the kiss.

Oh!

And so back into his hole.

ION. (*offering the figs*). So!

DIANA. Oh! *Ta sukobasileia!* And sweet!—Um!
. . . *Melichrotes!* *Ambrosia!** . . .

Ion, you bad old man! These figs . . .
Ah! The Tree You Must Not Pick!

ION. That is just how you go too smart! Mr.
Fleming, he will know the tree I pick for
these! . . .

DAVID moves involuntarily.

The tree, you plant together, the Day of
the Altar!

*Τά συκοβασιλεια, the figs royal.

Μελιχρότης, sweetness of honey.

Αμβροσία, ambrosia, food of gods.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Day of the . . . Yes, yes, perhaps there was some little ceremony, some—tree . . .

DIANA (*with quiet irony*). I too dimly remember some—altar.

ION. That is so. He dig, you plant: you make a dance about it and a song for Aphrodita! Then you tell me: *Go away, bad scamp!* *This tree, it is not forbid!* *It is ever and for always our tree: the Tree of Life!* So!

If required, the CURTAIN may aescend at this point.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

FIG-LEAVES

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: ROSIE and LEGGE, up on the terrace; BASIL and ION, by the garden; DAVID in the doorway. DIANA stands by the altar. After a moment of embarrassment, she speaks;

DIANA. Won't somebody have a fig? Rosie? . . .

The offer brings that lady flouncing down from the terrace.

ROSIE. Certainly not! I'm far too vexed to do anything so indecently irrelevant! What was that just now about Ion?

DIANA. Was there anything just now about Ion?

ROSIE. What's the use of pretending? He knew you were hiding up there all the time.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. Hiding? I was changing my clothes!

ROSIE. Clothes! If there's one thing I loathe, it is hypocrisy! If people must flop down upon you unexpectedly, they—they ought to prepare you beforehand.

DIANA. But my own dear disagreeable darling, you knew! My telegram distinctly . . .

ROSIE. Telegram! . . .

It is still in her hand. She reads;
“Arriving five tomorrow.”

DIANA (brightly). Exactly! Meaning *today*.

ROSIE. Tomorrow meaning today! My dear, it's too transparent! And to think of that deceitful old sneak being in it too! A secret like *you* over our heads, and him plumping down there the whole blessed afternoon, like an evil-minded uncommunicative oyster!

DIANA. Ion! . . .

Both women are now focussing him.
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ION. Now I think I go and rake my rose-bed.
That boy, he tramp it down, the—peri-winkle!

And he goes off pleasantly. Singing.

ROSIE. There, you see! Just piggish and insolent, all day long! I wish David would let us leave his beastly house! Horrid old graveyard!

DAVID (*testily*). My dear, you know very well, with this infernal lease on our hands . . .

ROSIE. Other people can arrange leases. Archie can!

DAVID. Well, I can't! Other people be . . .

ROSIE. You could, if you would; but you won't! Just on purpose to annoy me! Lot of ugly marble! And then *you* to turn up suddenly, startling the life out of me! It's all so inconsiderate!

DIANA. Well, but Rosie, sweetheart, I have owned up I'm a devil! I can't do more, now can

THE RIB OF THE MAN

I, unless I throw in adjectives; and you know that isn't nice!

ROSIE. It's not even as if I'd had any tea! I come home tired and miserable . . .

DAVID. Oh, for Heaven's sake, Rosie.

BASIL tries to be diplomatic and go;

BASIL. I say, Legge, perhaps we'd better . . .

But he gets jumped on for his pains;

DAVID. Certainly not! I shall deeply resent any such consideration for her feelings! Simply hysteria!

ROSIE. Nobody need go because of me! Lord knows I don't want to break up the happy party! I'm cross; and I don't mind the whole world knowing! I've had nothing but one exasperation after another, all day!

DIANA is going to end this. She takes ROSIE, and with maternal hand plants her firmly on the bench to the left.

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DIANA. Rosie, you naughty child! Now sit down and behave, do you hear? You mustn't fly off into tantrums for nothing. It isn't good for you.

DAVID. It's this — turkey - trotting! Thing, my mother never even heard of! Goes out simulating frenzied fowl! Then comes home like this!

DIANA (*thoughtfully*). I see! . . .

ROSIE (*sniffling*). Didn't turkey-trot!

DIANA. Didn't she then! Never mind, dearie, it's all right!

And with sudden impulse, she hugs her.

ROSIE. Poky old place!

*She regards her boot, prodding the toe
with her parasol, and from time to
time continues sniffling.*

DIANA. But come, don't let me keep you polite old things standing. Basil! David!—Oh

well, you always did like strutting in uniform! Me, I'll take my ancient place in the lap of my Lady Mother.

She sits on the altar and helps herself to a fig. BASIL takes the bench, right. LEGGE already occupies the top step of the terrace. DAVID, having made a movement towards ROSIE's bench, elects to stand.

That's the ticket! Now we're *all* comfy!
Glad to see me, David?

DAVID (*shortly*). Course! Why not?

DIANA. Like old times, isn't it: me perched up here?

BASIL. Yes, and by Jove, doesn't it do the eyes good!

DIANA. A-ha! An unexpected salute from the enemy!

And the tears come involuntarily.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL. Yes, you don't deserve it!—Same old termagant, I perceive! But you look stunning! Doesn't she, David?

DAVID. Course!

Rosie looks round at her and sniffs.

DIANA. Thanks, Rosie, darling! Oh, but I tell you, it's good to be back! I was beginning to doubt I should ever behold my beloved island again! Naturally, the poor Dad's death and all the memories. . . . Then, the War yonder and before that, the Movement. . . . And now suddenly this call from Ion—nay, not Ion—God!—And here I am! Here in the wine-dark midmost of my glorious passionate Ægean! Here on my island, my little jewel of an island! Oh! The very whiff of the air, the wind, the goodly blast of it intoxicates me! It began yesterday, the moment I left the Piræus. The whole of the way across, I felt it. My island, oh, my precious island, how I have agonized for you!—And now at last—*Heureka!* You can't dream, Basil—you

never had it: you can't, David, you never lost it: what it means to me! This gorgeous sea, the flame, the wonder, the miraculous clutch of it! Oh, thank God for Greece, her blessed islands, her seas, her skies, the never-ending loveliness of all good Greek things! I thought I had lost them! I thought I had put the joy and the love of them away from me forever! And they're flocking back again! They are here! Like children! Like my very own! Here! Knocking at the doors of my heart!

*She pauses, mingling tears and figs.
The silence is broken by an appreciation from ARCHIE;*

LEGGE. I say though, ripping!

DIANA. I am a fool, flying off into long-winded dithyrambs like this! Only people always do, when they get excited! You see, I've been so used to—to speaking, the last three years: the moment I'm properly wound up, instead of keeping silent about

THE RIB OF THE MAN

it, I . . . I just get up and—and make a speech!

*And she takes a miserable little bite
at a fig.*

BASIL. Do it again, old girl: we like it! You're funny!

DIANA (*brightening*). You wretch, how I loathe you!

BASIL. Well, I never did have any luck with you, Di!

DIANA (*flaring*). If you dare to call me Di, again! . . .

BASIL. There's the girl I love! Same old quarrelsome spitfire! And—Diana! Militancy hasn't thwarted your flirtatious wiles, apparently! Still sporting the feminine lure!

DIANA. Rosie, he's insulting my gown! He's known me so long as a navvy, whenever I dress decently, he begins ragging me! I suppose he's making *your* life a misery, these days.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Why we ever endure him, I don't know: unless it's just silly woman's weakness for the army. What do you do with him, Rosie?

ROSIE (*sniffling*). Don't do anything! He's always digging with David! Desolate old wilderness!

DAVID *makes a movement of impatience.*

BASIL. Anyway, Diana, suspending hostilities for the nonce, I will confess you've done yourself proud! Isn't that right, David? David! . . .

DAVID. Proud, of course, yes. Only, proud isn't the word.

ROSIE *registers both appreciations.*

BASIL. Spoken like a scholar: it isn't. There's only one word for it! Sorry it's not Greek, Diana; but you look—peachy!

*Before DIANA can immolate him,
ARCHIE has another inspiration;*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. And so say all of us! Haw! . . .

BASIL (*sotto voce*). Oh, my Lord, what have I done?

And ARCHIE doddles down to the altar.

LEGGE. Positively, had the word on the tip of my tongue; and then let Martin chip in first. Peachy! That's the idea! Haw! . . .

I say, oughtn't somebody to introduce me?—You don't know who I am. (*Waggishly*). Course, we all know about *you!* Haw!

DIANA. No, really! How encouraging!

LEGGE. Fact, I assure you! All those policemen, what! And the magistrate Johnnies!

DIANA. Ah, yes, the Johnnies!

LEGGE. Bit thick; but must have been awfully jolly, looking on. Forceable feeding, what! Haw!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Hello, Rosie, pip-pip with that introduction.

DIANA. Is that necessary? Aren't we already so familiar, that . . .

LEGGE. Haw, get you! These strange sweet intimacies, what! . . .

This brings Rosie to her feet at once.

ROSIE. It's Archie Legge. My sister, *Diana Brand!*
My *elder* sister.

DIANA. Come now, Rosie, you needn't rub in the age! I'm only thirty.

LEGGE. Really! Don't look it, I'll swear! 'Pon my word, if you'd asked me, I'd have said something more like—like . . .

DIANA. Something perfectly sweet and ingenuous like fifteen, I'm sure. *Won't* you sit down?

LEGGE. Here at your feet?—Rather! Like a piece of statuary: you above, me below; Beauty

THE RIB OF THE MAN

and the Beast, don't you know! (*To
BASIL*). What about it *now*, old chap?
Haw! . . .

His glee withers beneath ROSIE's eye.

Course, I mean—I'm the Beast.

DIANA. Thanks, you are very comforting. May I offer you a fig?

LEGGE. Say though really, you're a sport, if you *are* Diana Brand.

DIANA. So glad, I'm satisfactory. Have another.

He takes three and ruminates awhile.

Our own planting, David! Catch! . . .

DAVID. Nonsense, no! I'm not a little boy!

And he comes with great dignity and takes the fig, like a man. He then sinks meditatively to the left of ARCHIE.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. Enemy! . . .

BASIL. That's me. Where's the juiciest?

*He rises and takes his pick: then,
looking round maliciously, says;*

Hm! Think I'll be statuary too!

*He sits the other side of ARCHIE.
ROSIE, isolated, scans the group and
sniffles. Meanwhile, ARCHIE'S ru-
minations have come to an end.*

LEGGE. Course, I'm not one myself. Georgina is. She's everything—Socialism, New Thought, Rational Togs, all that rot. My idea is this. I like woman to be a woman. Give me woman on the pedestal: woman, the good sport, preserving the respect of man. Properly speaking, I represent the Antis. The Home, Darning, Dinner, Babies—all that kind of thing! Something beautiful about that, poetical, what!

The thought makes him blink a little.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Course, I like woman to be friendly. But what I say is, *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* So you see! There! In a nutshell! . . . Get me?

DIANA. I never heard the case put better.

LEGGE. Haw! How's that, Mr. Battered Hero? Always did like blue! . . .

Rosie's *sniffling becomes a downright whimper.*

DIANA. Why, you poor lonely mite! Never mind! She shall have a nice little fig all to herself, she shall!

She goes to her. The men rise.

ROSIE. I won't, I won't! I hate, I loathe, I abominate figs!

DIANA (*thoughtfully*). Oh! . . .

Well then, she shall come and sit on the nice comfortable altar, with her naughty old sister!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

She takes her there. The men instantly drift away: BASIL and DAVID, to the benches right and left respectively; whilst ARCHIE, after spinning once round like a dog, squats in the middle on the grass, facing the women. ROSIE meanwhile weeps. DIANA pats and pets her, mopping her eyes.

There! That all right?

Rosie. Nothing's all right! Everything's all wrong!
Everybody's so selfish!

David (*rising*). Oh, my . . .

Rosie. It's all very well, saying, *Oh my!*—*You've been happy, making a disgusting mess of yourself all day!* First he goes neglecting me for a lot of snake-goddesses and mud: then he comes and says, *Oh my!* And I've had no tea.

David. Then for the Lord's dear sake, my love, get some and . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*He'd like to say, "Choke yourself!"
but daren't.*

Oh, damn! I'll go and change my rags!

And he gets as far as the stairway.

ROSIE. There, you see! Husbands are all like that!

DIANA. David, you horrid thing, apologize!

DAVID (*turning*). Well, of course, I apologize. But she's such a confounded little fool!

And he commences to climb.

BASIL (*grinning*). Poison his tea, Mrs. Fleming!

LEGGE. This Johnny here—book, Rosie gave me—has an awfully good bit about neglectful husbands. He says: *The charming custom of the chimpanzee . . .*

DAVID, half-way upstairs, has turned.

DAVID. Rosie gave you a thing like that?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Yes, bit thick wasn't it? The woman did tempt me and I did . . .

Ever heard of it, anybody?

He shews the title with generous impartiality all round.

DIANA. Oh! *That* old back number!

LEGGE. What, you know it? 'Pon my word though, you and Rosie really . . .

ROSIE. I've never even looked at the loathsome book!

DIANA. Haven't you? Oh, *I* have.

ROSIE. I daresay you have. But if Archie says it's improper, I haven't!

DIANA. Improper? Nonsense! Out of date, if you like. Belongs to the dark ages when people honestly believed in Science and Mother Nature! Two or three years ago, you know. Before the Judgment: before the Great Awakening! To that pagan

THE RIB OF THE MAN

over-fed generation of prigs and pedants, Sex was the one obsession! They and the little whining crowd of poets and self-indulgents held it over us like a bludgeon! But now, real live men and women, spiritual beings, are coming back into the world! Improper! Nothing so fascinating, Rosie, darling! Just funny and old-fashioned, that's all: like anti-suffragism!

ROSIE. I think Archie ought to know what's improper better than you! At least, I hope so. He's a man.

DIANA (*amused*). Perhaps you're right, Rosie.

LEGGE. Well, I don't go so far as to say improper. Wouldn't like to say that about anything. I just say—sporty!

ROSIE (*snapping*). I call it disgusting!

DIANA. Idiotic's my adjective! I'll stick by that.

BASIL. Piffle's a good word.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. What is the filthy work, anyway? I can't read a mile off! Name the unmitigated muck!

They all do, together.

OMNES. PROUT ON SEX!

An avalanche of pans and crockery occurs in the cellar. A watering-pot flies wildly forth of the door. All turn, DAVID descending a step.

DAVID. What in the name of Satanas . . .

There is a general movement of enquiry.

ROSIE. Stop! If you do anything about it, I'll scream! You'll only bring him back again, and we'll never be rid of him!

DIANA. Whom?

ROSIE. Archie knows. He's hunting for worms! It's the author, and he'll clatter our heads off!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. I'll soon see whether any authors will clatter my head off!

ROSIE. Stop him, somebody! I'll scream!

DIANA. David, you're exciting her! David!

DAVID. Oh, well, if you're all bent on humouring her! . . . Only, it's such darnation foolery! Talking to me about authors! . . .

He sulks. DIANA looks like a snubbed naughty child. An embarrassing pause.

Come to that, I'm one myself! You don't find me clattering! Hysteria! . . .

DIANA tries to make things gay again;

DIANA. That reminds me! Talking of authors, what a pig, I am! How about the book, David?

DAVID. Book! What book?

DIANA. Why, ours, of course! My father's! The book about the altar!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Of all the cheek! That's *our* book! David's!

DIANA. Well, call it David's, if you like, little jealousy! He wrote it, I admit. Already published, David?

DAVID (*nettled*). Published! Merely a matter of some fifty thousand copies or so! I suppose you do mean my. . . . THE RIB?

DIANA. The—what?

DAVID (*tartly*). RIB!

DIANA (*disappointed*). Oh! Is that what you called it?

DAVID (*warmly*). And if I did! Why not?

DIANA (*warmer*). Why not! Only that I think perhaps the poor Dad's own title—especially in view of the idea of the book, the significance he. . . . Besides, you had all his papers.

DAVID. That's all very well, Diana; but since your father's death, his theories . . .

DIANA. Theories!

DAVID. Well, you know what I mean! In spite of this pretended ignorance, you did see the book, I presume?

DIANA (*shortly*). No! I've read nothing Greek for three years!

DAVID. Oh well, if you weren't even interested! It made noise enough in all conscience!

DIANA. Well, it was bound to do that! Its appeal to the Movement would at least ensure that! If I hadn't been so busy elsewhere, I myself even . . .

DAVID. Movement! You talk about Movement! What Movement?

DIANA. What Movement! Yours, mine, my father's! The Movement to which we pledged ourselves! The Woman's Movement! That was the book's strong point —the modern application, the significance! It was the meaning of this altar. You

don't think my father spent his glorious life delving into the mysteries of these islands, in order to provide lying little text-books for universities, do you?

DAVID. Well, what was his wonderful discovery, all said and done?

DIANA. The Primæval Matriarchy! The dawn of the world when God Himself was Woman! Something to give to Feminism the authority of the ages! It was no mere New Woman, my father found! His was the Ancient Woman rising from the dead! That was something worth writing about! The very scholars couldn't kill an idea like that! It put the book beyond their blind stupidity and blasphemy forever! Even your fool of a title couldn't alter that! Could it? . . . Did it?

DAVID. Of course, if you want to be personal . . .

DIANA. Personal! Do you think I'm considering *you*? Answer my question!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. What question?

DIANA. Do you wish me to say it all over again?

DAVID (*sputtering*). We'll have to go into that, some other time, when I—when I'm properly dressed! Upon my word, what with one thing and another! And now *that* noisy devil in the cellar come to plague me! Exploded theories! Feminism! Hysteria!

*And he disappears grumbling up the
stairway into the villa.*

DIANA has risen, tense with emotion.

DIANA. It all seems so—disloyal! His own title! And his poor dying wishes—all . . .

*With a swift movement, she turns her
back and goes up to the terrace.
She stands looking bitterly over the
sea.*

ROSIE (*to the men*). There, you see! She's just like that! Always!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Really!

ROSIE. Absolutely! You see, she'll make a speech presently!

DIANA. Oh, why didn't I know, why didn't I know!

ROSIE. Well, my dear, if it's the book you're still fussing about, it's been advertised enough!

DIANA (*flashing round*). Advertised!

ROSIE. Well, don't get violent! Only, you who always pretended to be so interested in everything Greek . . .

DIANA. How could I? I've been slaving night and day at the Front ever since the war began; and before that I was in prison!

ROSIE. Prison! She brags about it! Prison!

BASIL. At the Front! Do you mean—Red Cross?

DIANA. What do you imagine? Murdering?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Red Cross, how jolly! Tell us all about the war!

She blasts him with a look.

ROSIE. Prison!

DIANA. Yes, prison, prison, didn't you hear? Heaven knows, *that* was advertised widely enough!

ROSIE. But you seem proud of it!

DIANA. Wouldn't you be? It was for the Cause!

ROSIE. Proud of being imprisoned for biting a policeman!

DIANA (*fiercely*). That's a lie! I never bit anybody!

ROSIE. *Votes for Women* then! Same thing!

DIANA. Why, of course, I'm proud of it, you little timid silly! It shewed God thought me worthy! Isn't Christendom proud of the

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Lord Jesus being haled before Pontius Pilate, and mocked and spat upon and gibbeted like a dog? It's the same with all of us! Saints, Artists, Socialists, Philosophers, the glorious company of Martyrs and Believers, everywhere! Persecution! Scorn! Contempt! That's only the bitter witness of this world to the truth of the terrible witness burning within ourselves! You don't suppose that Kings and Cabinet Ministers and the Titled Scum that pandar to their lusts in newspapers are going to stand the flaming blasphemies of the Holy Ghost, do you? Any more than they did in old Jerusalem! Or in the days of Socrates! Or at the Reformation! Proud of it! Of course, I'm proud of it! It links me up with Christ.

ROSIE. Did you ever hear anything so outrageous?

BASIL. Never! Never! Except in the Bible!

ROSIE. Captain Martin!

LEGGE. Yes, I say, Martin!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL *is the picture of gleeful imbecility.*

BASIL. Yes! Now I think I'll go and help Ion rake that rose-bed! Unless, Diana, another little speech from you . . .

Ah! Come along, Legge! Something tells me we are no longer wanted here.

LEGGE. Eh? What! I will! Bone to pick with you! After all, playing the game, old man: playing the game! If you *are* a soldier!

*They go off arguing into the garden.
The name "Polly" is heard echoing
in the distance.*

DIANA stands in proud indecision for a moment. Then she rushes down to the altar impetuously, pauses, and suddenly crumples up at the feet of ROSIE.

DIANA. Rosie, darling, forgive me, forgive me! I didn't mean to be unkind to you: indeed, indeed, I didn't! Especially now! Now, of all times! It's my beastly temper! My

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ungovernable tongue! God help me, I....
Oh, I am so unhappy! Why can't I be
like other people?

ROSIE (*sadly*). You could be, Diana, if you'd only
try! It's really quite easy. But you don't try.

DIANA (*flaring again*). I do try! I'm trying all
the time! My life is one long agony of
trying! How dare you say, I don't? You
say everything you can to—to . . .

I came here, nothing but love and for-
giveness in my heart, putting away all
bitterness from me: not meaning to re-
member—anything! I wanted only to
think of you! I wanted only to think of
the loveliness of it all! Of the wonderful
beautiful thing that's going to happen!
And then every single one of you—*You*,
most of all! . . . Why *will* you be such a
damned little lunatic? Oh, oh, there I am
again, like a . . .

ROSIE (*whimpering*). I'm sure I do everything
woman can, to make myself pleasant to
everybody!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. I'm a beast, I know that! I'm sorry!

ROSIE. Should think so! Making me miserable! . . . It's so easy to be good and kind to people! Why can't people be good and kind? It's the little things that count! . . .

DIANA. Cry-babies, both of us! There, mop up, and don't be an idiot! Silly fools! One thing I hate, it is having a scene like this! We're acting like a couple of—women! There! Better? . . .

Now, let's talk about—It!

ROSIE. It! . . .

DIANA. Yes, the Secret.

ROSIE. Oh, these mysteries! What secret?

DIANA. Why, *the Secret*, of course! The Secret that brought me back again.

ROSIE. I don't know of any secret that could bring you back again!

DIANA. Rosie! The most exquisite secret in the world! Imagine! It came to me yonder

THE RIB OF THE MAN

—out there on the battlefield! I was sick, I was weary, I was worn out with long bitter watching of the dead and dying! Oh, that sepulchre of horror! And then That came! It was like a blessed resurrection! That message of New Life from Ion!

ROSIE. Ion!

DIANA. Yes, he heard you talking about it! You and David. Down there, under the fig-tree.

ROSIE. Ion heard? But he's deaf! He never hears a single . . .

Heard what?

DIANA. Oh, Rosie, how hard you're making it for me! Here am I, singing you my little song of Elizabeth, and you won't understand!

ROSIE. But you're frightening me! Tell me plainly what you mean.

DIANA. Darling, whatever could I mean but one thing? The holiest, the most precious

THE RIB OF THE MAN

thing ever dreamed in the heart of woman. Motherhood, I mean! I mean—your little unborn baby!

ROSIE. Motherhood! I!

DIANA. Rosie! Rosie, darling!

ROSIE. Stop! Don't touch me! It's all a hideous mistake! It's not true!

DIANA. Not true! . . .

ROSIE. It's that evil eavesdropping old devil! He's got everything wrong!

DIANA. Not true! . . .

ROSIE. It's true, David and I did discuss. . . . Intimately, as married people will. . . . In fact, we quarrelled—violently! Men are so selfish! But as for my ever. . . . On the contrary! The absolute contrary! That's why we quarrelled.

DIANA. In other words, you—repudiate—Motherhood!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. I don't see why *you* should object! I'm a free modern woman! In that at least!

DIANA (*slowly*). Yes, I think I begin to understand.

ROSIE. Let's have no more of it! It's not a subject . . .

DIANA. And I was useful yonder, among the dead and dying! . . .

ROSIE. What has that to do with it?

DIANA. Only that I need not have come here after all!

She sits looking into unseen things.

ION enters from the garden, singing.

Crossing the yard, he halts with glad surprise at the watering-pot.

ION. Ah, what I want! Some angel drop it for me!

A rattling comes from the cellar.

Yes!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*He makes once more for the garden.
ROSIE follows his every movement
suspiciously. She now calls sharply;*

ROSIE. Ion!

*A whimsical smile creeps over his
mouth, as he turns back.*

Are you deaf? .

ION. No!

*And he passes out, a thing of joy and
high Greek song.*

*If required, the CURTAIN may descend
at this point.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

THE FLAMING SWORD

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: ROSIE, seated on the altar: DIANA, lost in thought, at her feet below. ION's song is still heard, dying away down the garden. ROSIE looks after him bitterly.

ROSIE. And that's the man, my poor dear dead Papa trusted so blindly. I always knew there was something sly about him. Only David never would listen to me. Men are such fools!

DIANA slightly shifts her position, but makes no other comment.

If he had, we'd have been gone ages ago. It's not even as if there were any real convenience. Granted, there's the garden and the fruit and all that; but Lord, the fuss, if ever anybody wants a fig! What did you do with them?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA *hands the figs.* ROSIE *pokes among them, but the best are gone.*

Self, that's the trouble! Nothing but self, self, self! If I've spoken once about that bath-room door, I have a thousand times! There again!—Only one bath-room! I've spoken about that too. Of course, the sea is pretty. But I don't like sea. Motherhood, indeed! What did he say precisely?

DIANA. Do you think all that matters very much now?

ROSIE. Not if you want to be disagreeable, dear. It was you first broached the indelicate subject.

DIANA. Sorry. I'll try and be more—feminine.

ROSIE. You needn't air any of your superior sarcastic speeches on me! I'm not impressed like some people. What's more, I consider your conversation just now when they were here, absolutely immoral! *You* may have thought it clever: but men don't really

THE RIB OF THE MAN

admire that kind of woman. They despise them! Oh, how they despise them!

DIANA. The men! Ah, yes, I had forgotten the dear men!

ROSIE. Well, I can't answer for your precious Captain Martin! But I'm perfectly certain Archie . . .

DIANA. What! Have I shocked the chaste Archie?

ROSIE. You've shocked every decent man among them!

DIANA. Yes, how many might that amount to exactly, out of the three?

ROSIE. You'll soon see how many! *They* won't stand any of your wickedness! Not if they're men! Nor your Greek! Nor your gown! Nor God's Name taken in vain! They'll hate you like poison! At least they're Christians!

And she wails miserably. DIANA turns upon her like a dragoness;
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DIANA. Stop howling you—Rib! . . .

The effect is miraculous. She stops.

LEGGE and BASIL are heard approaching from the garden.

Ah! . . . Well I'm ripe for them!

The two men enter, wrangling. ROSIE breaks into a beatific smile.

ROSIE (*sweetly*). So you're back again!

LEGGE. 'Pon my word, never heard such a bare-faced wriggler in my life!

BASIL. Legge, as I'm an honest worm, you wrong me!

LEGGE. Soon know about that! Rosie! See that whitened what-d'you-call-it? Nice little spliced choir-boy, *he* is! Flatly denies ever having told you a thing!

BASIL. I warn you, Legge, you are courting hideous doom!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Did you or did you not deny it?

BASIL. Did! But . . .

LEGGE. Don't wriggle! That's Martin all over!
First denies: then wriggles! Hands me out
a rotten old homily on Woman's Rights!
Yes, you did: out there! You're no sol-
dier: you're a clergyman! (*Exploding*).
A woman like Polly has no rights!

ROSIE. Oh, yes, Polly! . . .

LEGGE. There, that shews! Liar! She knows all!

BASIL (*grinning*). Legge, if you call me a liar
again, I'll punch your head.

ROSIE. What I want to . . .

LEGGE. One moment, Rosie! I'll settle his hash!

ROSIE. Yes, but is this Polly person . . .

LEGGE (*testily*). Well, we all know about that!
Polly is—Polly: never pretended she wasn't.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

What's done can't be undone, spilt milk,
it's an ill wind, awfully sorry and all that!
But, my Lord, if you're going to make a
political question out of Polly. . . . What
do you say, Miss Brand?

DIANA. I fear I don't quite fathom Polly. I find
her so far, vague—though suggestive.

LEGGE. Course, I forgot! You don't know! Haw!

*And for the moment, he is taken
aback.*

DIANA. I'm sure, you'll be sweet enough to en-
lighten me.

LEGGE. Well, Polly. . . . Mixed company, what!
However, Modern Thought, don't you
know: Plain Speaking! No silly shame
necessary, that I can see!—All cultivated
people! Rosie knows, we know, and *you've*
read *this* fellow! So there you are! Nut-
shell! Polly! . . . Get me?

DIANA. *Ad nauseam.*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Quite so! Haw! . . .

He pulls at his moustache.

Same time, there's my wife. Georgina's all right, but she's one of these good women, you understand. No earthly idea of simple unashamed affection. Man's Life, don't you know, Affinity, Self-expression!—Means nothing to her! Deuce of a row! . . .

Seems to me, existence is one long wobble between some good Bad Woman who treats you—cordially, and some bad Good Woman who gives you a bally rotten time! Nothing personal, of course!

DIANA. Gratified, I'm sure!

LEGGE. But for that holy-minded baa-lamb to go about blabbing it to everybody . . .

DIANA. Do you think, perhaps, he may be a trifle dense?

LEGGE. Jolly well positive! Then to begin preaching! Him! And *you* know what soldiers

THE RIB OF THE MAN

are! If there's one thing I hate, it is a moralizing aviator!

DIANA. One meets so many of them!

LEGGE. Better begin writing tracts at once! Wrap 'em up in sugar-paper and send 'em to your maiden aunt! Then he calls himself an officer and a gentleman! Hasn't the sympathetic instincts of a salmon! *This* Johnny knows more! Lord, I could laugh! Little Polly Froufrou, a plea for Woman's Rights!

DIANA. When she is palpably only one more plea for Woman's everlasting Wrongs!

LEGGE. Woman's everlasting—what?

DIANA (*fiercely*). Wrongs, you leper, wrongs!

ROSIE. Diana!

LEGGE. Haw! I see!—It's a joke! Woman's Rights —Woman's Wrongs! Awfully good! Good enough for *Life*.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Same time, don't let's frivol! Serious side to it, after all. If you only knew Georgina . . .

ROSIE. Archie! Archie! Don't you understand? She means it! She's insulting you!

LEGGE. Insulting me!

ROSIE. Yes, it's what they do! They're all like that, these suffrage women!

LEGGE. But she . . .

BASIL. It's no use: he'll never understand! That kind of nymphomaniac never does!

LEGGE. Insulting me! Do I gather that I am being insulted by a woman who has been forcibly fed?

BASIL. That's it, Legge! I see, I was mistaken! You're getting it!

LEGGE. Why then, I *am* insulted! Grossly insulted! Never so insulted in my life!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Won't stand it for one moment! At least I hope I am a gentleman! I—I'll go into the garden and pick figs!

He goes out snorting.

ROSIE turns on DIANA furiously;

Rosie. I hope you'll never get a vote as long as you live! He's gone; and it's all your fault!

DIANA. Well, that's one good thing! Too many of these jigging perverts about, flaunting their cheap lusts in people's faces!

Rosie. He doesn't jig! He's the only decent dancer in the Archipelago! And now he'll never, never, never come back any more!

BASIL. Diana, your last remark makes me grasp the *Bacchæ* of Euripides, better than I ever did before.

DIANA (*captured by the idea*). That's interesting! . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

The thought so fascinates her, she is about to follow it up; but she is switched back to ROSIE;

(*Violently*). Rosie, if you begin howling again, I'll shake the life out of you!

Rosie. Yes, that's all you can do! Threaten and play the bully! It'll be bombs and breaking windows next!

Basil. Supposing I put in another little word! . . .

They both obliterate him at once;

Both. No!

DIANA. We've had too many little words from men already! The world is full of them! And that was idiotically out-of-place about Euripides, anyway! It's about time women began talking!

BASIL. All the same, Diana, Verrall's great contention . . .

DIANA (*stamping*). Basil!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE (*fishing for him*). There, you see! She's like that!

DIANA (*stamping*). Rosie!

ROSIE (*stamping*). I won't be quiet! I'm a woman too! I will talk! I will! I will!

DIANA. Rosie, if you keep on whining . . .

ROSIE. You great big coward, I hate you!

DIANA. This comes of the vaunted Happy Home! This comes of the four smug walls of the dear Protected Life! This is your beautiful middle-class comfort and respectability and all the other infidelities! Blaspheme the deeper purposes and responsibilities of God's world! Then howling and whining, and apes like that dangling about the house!

BASIL. There's something in what you say, Diana!

DIANA. What do you know about it?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. There, that's what you get! Serves you right! You wouldn't take my part, when she bullied me!

BASIL. Come now, Mrs. Fleming . . .

ROSIE. No, I hate you! I hate you both! I hate you!

She bursts into a flood of tears.

DIANA. Oh, these Niobes! No wonder, men despise us!

ROSIE. There! Now she's back to suffrage again!

DIANA. Suffrage, you simpleton!

ROSIE. You began about men! What's that but suffrage? You're *always* arguing about it!

DIANA. I never argue suffrage! Nobody does! The time for arguing suffrage passed ages ago! All the decent people accept it: the others are only so many wingless waddling dodos! This isn't argument, you—eocene! It's plain womanish rage! I'm just an or-

THE RIB OF THE MAN

dinary overtaxed infuriated human creature, planted in a cosmos of gibbering lunatics! Oh, I know I'm a fool, I know I'm a fool, losing my head like this! You don't imagine I'm happy about it, do you? Argument! If you believe I'm standing up here, making myself hot and miserable, to regale you with Aristotelian discourse, you are jolly well mistaken! I'm simply telling you! The whole boiling of you!

BASIL. Nevertheless, Diana, pyrotechnics like this . . .

DIANA. Anyway, my pyrotechnics don't destroy innocent babies and cathedrals!

BASIL. True! Yet, as a serious contribution to the joyous occasion of your home-coming . . .

DIANA (*with biting emphasis*). Am I attempting to seriously contribute . . .

BASIL (*inexpressibly shocked*). Oh, split infinitive! Diana! And you the daughter of a scholar!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Yes, she's always doing things like that!

DIANA (*fiercely*). Am I, you little prig? And who is it, that's always . . . Oh, what's the use? —Wasting time in a bedlam of chattering women and soldiers! (*Starting again*). One thing, I'll swear! Never again, as long as I live . . .

DAVID appears hastily from the loggia above, a thought in his mind. He is washed and "groomed" and immaculately clad in cream with a golden blazer. He comes dressed to his doom.

DAVID. And another thing, Diana! . . .

A door is heard slamming in the house.

Curse that bath-room door! Why can't somebody . . .

It's about that book, Diana! I've been thinking up there, thinking furiously; and . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Meanwhile he has descended the stairway.

ROSIE. You'd better tell him yourself! I'm sick of speaking!

DAVID (*irritably*). What's that? Tell whom? What?

ROSIE. Your precious Ion! If I've spoken about that door once, I have a . . .

DAVID. Yes, yes, we don't want the usual sermon over it! Everlastingly . . .

Now you've driven clean out of my mind what I wanted to . . .

DIANA (*ominously*). That book! My father's book!

She adds with concentrated irony;

THE RIB! . . .

DAVID. Exactly! My book! **THE RIB!** . . .

*And there momentarily he stops.
They regard each other intently.*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Only wants one of those rubber things,
they . . .

DAVID (*explosively*). Oh, Rosie, do for Heaven's
sake . . .

*She goes and perches conspicuously
on the third step of the stairway,
dramatising God's Little Despised
Worm.*

BASIL sits on the bench, right, his
head bent, thinking. And remains
so.

ROSIE. Pigs!

Presently DIANA speaks;

DIANA. Well, what about it?

DAVID (*blustering*). Well, what about it?

DIANA. You intimated just now, you had some-
thing . . .

DAVID. So I have! Volumes! I've thought of
nothing else, the whole time I was dressing!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

What the devil's wrong with the title, I'd like to know! It's conveniently short: it's popular: descriptive.

DIANA. It misrepresents my father. It's a lie.

DAVID. It's been recognized by every reputable university in the world.

DIANA. So was Iscariot's kiss by the Sanhedrin.

DAVID (*flaring*). If your father were such a stickler for trifles, why on earth didn't he get you to write the book? You were almost as much acquainted with the discoveries as I.

DIANA (*grimly amused, conceding the point*). Almost!

DAVID. Very well then! Why didn't he . . .

DIANA. Why? You ask me why?

DAVID (*hesitating*). Yes, I—I do!

She searches him steadily and replies;
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DIANA. Well, there *were*—reasons.

DAVID *winges, but remains silent.*

For one thing, the poor soul died. Or have you forgotten that too? Don't you remember, there was a funeral: out in the little Cemetery of Apollo yonder—where he found the altar. Rosie wept, I recollect; and you made a beautiful speech! Quoted Pericles! That bit about ancestors! About lordly fathers! About the obligations we owe the masterly dead!

ROSIE *sniffs at Pericles.*

DAVID. Of course, if you care to twit me on my humble beginnings, my poverty . . .

I admit, I owe your father much. Much!

But she shakes her head relentlessly.

DIANA. No, you can't escape me, that beggarly way. It isn't the humble beginnings, Doctor David Fleming!

DAVID (*sputtering*). It's all this infernal fuss about titles, I do so violently deprecate!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. So I observe. I wonder what's behind it.

DAVID. Even the copyright law, with its multitudinous damfooleries, doesn't acknowledge titles!

DIANA. Oh, you're safe enough, legally! My point is merely honour, *moral* right!

DAVID. Well, and what moral wrong . . .

DIANA. Tampering with the fruits of another man's life. It's like infanticide! It's like child labour!

DAVID. All the same, thousands . . .

DIANA. Oh, I know it's done! It's done in the best literary circles! People get decorations, enormous triumphs, out of it! But what kind of a low-down cur, do you think, would lend himself to it?

DAVID. I must protest . . .

DIANA. So must I! A little more vociferously than you! Don't you understand? This is

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*Ananke, Nemesis, the Day of Judgment,
come upon you!*

DAVID. Well, since you're quoting, THE RIB has good sound biblical . . .

DIANA. Listen, you shifty knave! There's more behind this temporising, than mere titles! Disloyalty upon disloyalty! I'll unmask them all! First, answer me that question you evaded just now, when you went up-stairs.

DAVID. What—question?

DIANA. Concerning this—RIB, you trickster!

DAVID. I tell you, that title . . .

DIANA. We've done with titles! Come to the book itself! What have you done with my father's Interpretation?

DAVID. If you'd only . . .

DIANA. My father's Interpretation!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Yes, but . . .

DIANA. The Interpretation!

DAVID. The entire archæological outlook has changed, since your father's day!

DIANA. In three years? In these waters? During the war?

DAVID. It's terribly difficult to explain. You see, when one man writes a book, and another . . .

DIANA (*impatiently*). Provides every scrap of the material, yes, yes! . . .

DAVID. Yes, but all so disarranged, ill-digested, so fantastical—theoretical . . .

DIANA. Why, the whole thing was planned! Only wanted writing! Every particle of the evidence pigeonholed and docketed! And the Interpretation, with this altar as the sign and symbol of it, apocalyptically perfect!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. That was just the point. I tell you, your father's *a priori* speculations . . .

DIANA. Well?

DAVID. How can I explain, and you hectoring me like this? If you'd only keep calm . . .

DIANA. Go on. I'm deadly calm.

And she is. But DAVID blunders on.

DAVID. Of course, everybody admires your father. I myself owe him—lots. After all, he did . . . There was the altar.

DIANA (*ironically*). There was!

DAVID. Naturally, in those first days, we all got tremendously excited. These wonderful discoveries, and the recognition. . . . I'm afraid we rather lost our heads. And without doubt, your father's vigorous personality, his fine rugged pioneer work . . .

DIANA. Fine rugged wow wow wow, yes?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Well, damn it, since you will be rude, there was a reaction! There had to be! Theories are all very well; but, my Lord, theories that line you up with all the political anarchies of the present day. . . . They had to go! They *had* to! Men's minds sober down: inevitably, they take on judgment, balance, a more conservative safer point of view . . .

DIANA. The irreligious hounds, do they?

DAVID. Oh, the devil! You *won't* understand!

DIANA. But you're talking like some pettifogging Doctor of an university!

DAVID. Well, I suppose that's what I am! After all, Oxford, Göttingen, Berlin . . .

DIANA. My God!

And she bursts into bitter laughter.

DAVID. Anyway, that's more than ever your father . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. Black abominable ingrate!

DAVID. Oh! How can I make you understand? These actions are forced upon one! They are a necessity! They are a part of life! Almost a biological necessity! Like war! Like many things! Can't you understand?

DIANA. Oh, I understand, well enough! You have taken my father's glorious golden child of fire and crucified it for your own safe, sober, desecrating RIB! Oh, you have mangled the unborn babe in the womb—like those other pedagogic monsters yonder! You! You! You, that owed him everything! Why, the clothes you wore, your education, the bread that fattened your sly reptile life . . . Everything! And then—here! Here, among the miracles! Didn't the very stones clamour against you: the glens, the caverns, the quarried wonders of his beloved kingdom? And the garden! There, where he and you and I. . . . When the nightingales . . . Oh, sacrilege! Contamination!

And all for what? For recognition!
For success! For the petty plaudits of the

universities! - The universities that turn down classics for a bastard culture of efficiency! - The universities that disqualify women, cast out pacifists, economists, musicians! - The universities that foster atheism, or worse—revivalistic devil-worship! - The universities with their sinister background of the landlord, swindling iron-mongers, oilmongers, the canaille monarchies! - Do you think the poet-dreamers that revealed the ancient secrets of these sacred islands, cared for universities? Did Schliemann care? Did Evans? Did any of them care? No! - They were the little workmen band of true believers, that turned their backs on dictionaries and dead bibles! The word came; and forsaking everything, they took up living pick and shovel, and they followed. My sublime father transcended them all! In a sense, he was all! His great spirit brooded over this Ægean like some olden God, transfigured and shewn anew. He offered us his precious child to redeem us from the pagan darkness of these Pharisees; and you, like Judas, have betrayed him!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. (feverishly). You have said cruel, unforgivable things, Diana! Nevertheless, I still stoutly maintain . . .

DIANA. Oh, I know the fetters you have forged won't break so readily!

DAVID. What do you mean?

DIANA. What that old Greek proverb means—the one you used to quote so glibly: *Character is destiny!*

DAVID. I don't perceive the application.

DIANA. Look inside you, man! There at your black heart's core! There where the hidden thoughts dwell unspoken, making and unmaking forever the destinies of life. You know the secret thing, I name! False one way, false another! That's where all these piled-up infidelities began!

DAVID. Infidelities! Do you charge me!!!

DIANA. Look inside, I say! Link by link, you have forged it for yourself! You can't escape!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Not until you pay the uttermost farthing!
Character is *destiny*! Out upon you, un-
faithful servant! Faithless to your dying
master's wishes! Faithless to your scholar-
ship, your calling! Faithless to your breth-
ren, the toiling comrades of the awakening
world! Faithless first of all in—Love!

DAVID. Diana, how dare you!

ROSIE. David, don't listen to her! Oh, you vam-
pire! David has his faults!—Nobody knows
that better than I! He's mean, he's selfish,
he's neglectful! But at least, at least he's
faithful!

*She utters the last word in a high
exacerbated howl.*

DIANA. Ah!—You! I had forgotten *your* share in
all this holocaust of desolation!

ROSIE. I'll be revenged on you for this, yes, I
will! I'll do something desperate! I—I'll
put it in the hands of my solicitor! I'll tell
everybody what you are!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. Trumpet it in the ears of Zeus the Thunderer and all the choiring galaxies of high Olympos! Trumpet it through the echoing abysses of Hell, and rouse the wrath of Rhadamanthus! I'll trumpet first!

DAVID. Diana!

DIANA. He was mine—mine, do you hear?—before you came! Oh, I know no word was spoken! Only the trees whispered it! Only the maiden moon, the stars, the violet flaming of the dusk, looked down upon it! It dwelt within, the vast unuttered longing of our hearts! An exquisite silence! You came, and stole him from me!

DAVID. Diana!

DIANA. My father's illness helped you! You crept in like a serpent, whilst I nursed him, and you worked your poisonous will. You, the simple little school-girl from Germany! You, the little sly minx of the knowing mind, of the furtive novelette, the baby!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

You, the little turkey-trotter from the boarding-school! You knew, you knew what you were doing! You came like Eve, that thief in the night; that wanton, that Rib of all the sorrows of the ages, and you robbed me of my Eden! I was his Lilith, that wretched, first, forgotten one; and you stole him from me!

DAVID. Diana!

DIANA. And what have you done for him? This! Turned him and all the promise of his youth to spiritual beggary! What have you done for yourself? You are idle, vain, luxurious, you don't labour! You work people socially for your own ends! You fritter away your time with the lecherous nincompoops of that Saturnalia, the modern dance! You despise your husband's profession; and yet you live upon his bread! You cadge! You sponge! Why, you are not even an honourable wife! You claim the advantages of a man's hearth and home: you prate of faithfulness; and then —you repudiate his child!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Silence, you . . .

DIANA. Why should I be silent? I have been silent for three long bitter years! I will shout it to the heavens! I will shout until the Blessed Mother of God flings wide the windows of those glittering mansions, and looks down in pity upon Womankind! I speak no longer for myself alone! But for all women! All the despised ones! All the cast-out Hagars, the Medeas: the childless Liliths of Eve's polluted Eden! *Aiai, epathon tlamon epathon megalon axi' odur-mon!** Oh, that ancient singer of the woes of women—"the human, with his droppings of warm tears"—he knew! . . . He knew! . . .

She is about to break down.

DAVID. Nevertheless, I invincibly maintain . . .

DIANA. Out of my path! I have done with men now!

* *aiai, ἔπαθον τλάμων ἔπαθον μεγάλων ἄξι' ὀδυρμῶν.* Woe is me! I have suffered, I have suffered, mighty wrongs, worthy of lamentations! (EURIPIDES, Medea, III.)

THE RIB OF THE MAN

And recovering herself, she passes like flame into the garden.

DAVID *is left stupefied for the moment.*

BASIL *rises heavily from his meditation.*

DAVID. Basil, I give you my word of honour as a gentleman . . .

BASIL. Oh, go to the devil! I'm after Diana!

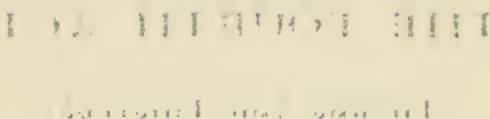
He limps into the garden.

DAVID *turns towards his wife. She is glaring at him. He glares back again, bristling his moustache.*

If required, the CURTAIN may descend at this point.

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT
THORNS AND THISTLES



THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: ROSIE and DAVID stand glaring at each other. The first violet touch of twilight faintly tinges the Aegean sky.

Rosie. To think that such a thing should happen to me! And I've done nothing whatever to deserve it!

DAVID. Rosie, do for God's sake stop ventilating your own personal feelings! I'm the real sufferer, not you! Do think a bit about me!

Rosie. But she said that you and she . . .

DAVID. She also said that you and that nincompoop . . .

Rosie. Yes, but here! In my own Edén! It all seems so . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Well, well, and what then? I confess to a certain streak of sentimentality inherited from my mother. Racial, I suppose! She was. . . . Besides, it's not true! Didn't you hear her say, no word was spoken? Can't a man have a racial streak from his mother, without you . . .

ROSIE. Yes, but Diana! My own sister! She *said* you were an evader! If there's one thing I loathe, it is unfaithfulness!

DAVID. But I'd never even met you!

ROSIE. You should have known! You should have known, that I was waiting for you in the Yet-to-be!

DAVID. There you go again! Here am I, a man whose whole career is blasted, his ambitions blown to smithereens by that woman; and you do nothing but discuss your own wounded little vanities! Can't you realize the immensity of this tragedy? It's cataclysmic! It's like the war! It's like the toppling of an empire! And you choose

THE RIB OF THE MAN

just this moment, when I am girt in by
an implacable iron ring of enemies . . .

ROSIE. Enemies! . . .

DAVID. Yes, pack of myopic degenerates! And they can't see, they simply can't see how right I am! Curse them, oh, curse them! I tell you, the hymn of hate that rises up in my heart . . .

ROSIE. But there's only one! Only Diana!

DAVID. She'll tell everybody! There's not a newspaper in the world that won't back up her story! As for these others, my competitors, don't you know, the whole perfidious crew is against me? Just waiting for my downfall! Well, they've forced this thing upon me! If it's war, I'm prepared for them! Envy, that's the secret! Envy of my attainments! Envy of my far-flung reputation! Envy of my—well, culture and efficiency!

Rosie. I know it's dreadful to be misunderstood!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. I don't mind being misunderstood; if they'd only stop interfering with my schemes! A man like me is bound to be misunderstood! What do they know of advanced Zarathustrian psychology? That woman prates of your father's scholarship! What of me? I'm a super-scholar! This isn't egotism! This isn't megalomania! It's simply *a priori* subjective assurance of manifest destiny: I know I'm It! Got it from my mother! As a child, I strutted with a little cocked hat and a flag and a drum, singing, *Me above everybody!* And then to be goaded from my peace-loving life, by battalions of grasping barbarians, who won't even acknowledge their infamy!

ROSIE. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! . . .

DAVID. Oh, Shakespeare, my Shakespeare: so much mine, I could almost believe I wrote him! He knew! He knew, when speaking out of the agony of his great heart, he said: *The world is out of joint! Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Now, *he's* spouting!

DAVID. There's one thing! If I'm dragged down, they shall all come too! I've prepared for this! I believe in preparedness! I laid my plans long ago—when I was in your father's employment! I saw the old man weakening, long before anybody else did! I calculated to a nicety! Then when at last, the day . . .

ROSIE. As though any of it really very much mattered!

DAVID. You'll know soon enough, whether it matters! When we are beggared! No more home comforts! No more entertainments! No more jolly little dinners! . . .

By the bye, what *was* that mess you gave me for lunch? You know I like my food wallowing in butter! And now, on top of everything—This!

ROSIE. That was your darling Ion! I knew you'd be cross!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Seems to me, wherever I turn, my will is thwarted, my loftiest ideals profaned! My mother was the only woman that could ever manage kidneys! Then for that shameless hussy, your sister, to stand up there and brazen me out . . .

ROSIE (*on her mettle*). Anyway your mother couldn't . . .

DAVID (*on his*). She never mistook dry shreds of desiccated rag for kidneys!

ROSIE. You should hear Ion about your mother!

DAVID. There, I'm done with you! I'm done with the whole family! Oh, loneliness! Oh, intolerable loneliness of the Over-soul! I'll be revenged for this! I'll think out something catastrophic, irrevocable, some deed of frightfulness! I'll—I'll send in my resignation! I . . .

No, I won't! That would be too simple! They might not see the heroism of that! Something with more sentiment to it, more drama! . . . Ah! I have it!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE (*whimpering*). Always this, always this!
When there's kidneys!

DAVID. Yes, that's the idea! Yonder, on some tall cliff overlooking my own *Ægean*, my cloak about me, lonely, like an emperor: the pistol at my head. . . .

ROSIE. My God! It's in the air!

DAVID. Then, when they'd all be crying, *Crucify!* . . . And yet, perhaps, before the fatal moment, one little speech, a swan-song . . .

ROSIE. David! David! . . .

He gazes at her, long and terribly.

DAVID. Rosie, you are right! I see! I see! Death would be sublime; but it is prouder, braver, grander still to live and face them out! Eternal-Womanly, ever beckoning, you have shewn me the diviner way! I'll live and civilize them!

ROSIE. My hero!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Not quite, my pole-star; but I will be!
Yes, I see the way! That book, it was
entrusted to my sacred care by One alone!
We two will guard it! Myself and God!
Yes, with the sword unscabbarded if needs
be, against any woman in the world!

*And as he says it, he looks every inch
a king.*

Somebody coming! If it's Diana, don't
say where I am. I'll slip out quietly.

*He darts for the cellar; but on the
threshold jumps as though stung.*

What the . . .

*And he sneaks upstairs swiftly into
the villa. A moment later, ARCHIE
lounges in lugubriously from the
garden.*

ROSIE. Oh, it's you!

LEGGE. Yes, it's me.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Boy!

LEGGE. Little woman!

ROSIE. Won't you sit down?

They do so, at the base of the altar.

Archie, I have some bitter news to break
to you.

LEGGE. Really! That's odd! I have some bitter
news to break to you!

ROSIE. Try and be brave, Archie! Nobly, for my
sake!

LEGGE. 'Pon my word! Very thing, I wanted to
say myself!

ROSIE. Why, what can you . . .

LEGGE. No! Ladies first, Rosie!

ROSIE. Then, briefly. Archie—Oh, my poor boy!—
We must part forever!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Positively uncanny! That's the identical . . .

ROSIE. I know what you would say! Your soul divined it! I'm like that too. After all, sympathy such as ours surpasses words!

LEGGE. Yes, but Rosie . . .

ROSIE. No, Archie, please! I can't bear it! I know the passionate longings, the unuttered anguish, the vain regrets! I can read them in your eyes!

He blinks.

Let them rest there. Life is very hard, isn't it, Archie?

LEGGE. Bally awful, if you ask me.

ROSIE. And this is the end. You will go your way; and I, mine. Like that other ill-starred couple in the Long-ago. I'm Josephine: you are Napoleon. I must follow my destiny. Only, I believe in history, it was the other way about.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Quite so.

ROSIE. Isn't it strange, Archie, in misery like ours, when all else fails, there is still one comfort left! Destiny, Fate, the Thing that Had to Be!

LEGGE. Often thought so myself!

ROSIE (*her heart breaking*). Oh, Archie, Archie, shall you ever forget That Night? That night of the naval ball! The night they sank the battleships!

*She quavers a sad remembrant phrase
of haunting rag-time.*

Do you remember? . . .

LEGGE. Rather! . . . And afterwards, don't you know, the lobster . . .

ROSIE. Yes, the dear broiled lobster too! Each tender thought has place in memory's sad dream! Poor foolish tears! . . .

He blinks. She hands him her handkerchief. He dabs, and gives it back.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Do you know, Archie, I have a presentiment, I shall never never dance again!

LEGGE. No, really! Why?

ROSIE. Something whispers it! I'm like that! In the first place, there'll be no men! Doesn't the war come home to one? And then, with all that grief abroad, it may not be considered quite—the thing! No! I shall turn elsewhere. I shall find my place, be sure of it! Not so happy a place perhaps; but no less beautiful! I will take up something noble! Something sorrowfully lofty! Something to help a little. Possibly—spiritualism.

LEGGE. I was thinking of golf, myself.

ROSIE. Do, Archie. It will buck you up.
And now, before *Good-bye*. . . . You have heard my bitterness. What's yours?

LEGGE. There's the joke! Precisely the same thing!
We must part forever! Haw!

ROSIE. What! . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE. Fact! Funniest thing I ever struck in my life! Got my things packed this afternoon! That's why I disappointed you at the Kafenia!

ROSIE. But Archie, why?

LEGGE. Deuced awkward to explain! You see, in that letter I wouldn't shew you, Georgina said—I jolly well had to!

ROSIE (*rising*). Oh! Good-bye!

She has the manner of an icicle.

LEGGE (*rising*). Tra-la-la!

He is going: but returns.

I say, Rosie, last time, don't you know!
Just one turn!

He tootles and assumes a gallinaceous posture. She remains unmoved.

Come now, Rosie, be a sport!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

*He flaps and squirms abdominally;
but already her soul is turned to
higher things.*

BASIL, *watch in hand, re-appears
from the garden.*

BASIL. Legge, your boat sails in fifteen minutes. Now, don't argue! Remember what I said! When the Harbour Master's gun goes off, you do.

LEGGE. Why, the gun?

BASIL. Sundown: all safe! The vessel's neutral and babies aboard; so you *mayn't* be submarined!

LEGGE. Submarined! . . .

BASIL. You have a quarter of an hour.

LEGGE. But . . .

BASIL. Quarter of an hour. Come! I see Miss Brand approaching.

LEGGE *bolts at once for the cellar.*
[150]

THE RIB OF THE MAN

LEGGE (*within*). Oh, get out of my way!

There is a sound of hissing.

BASIL. They fizzle at the end, don't they? These —affinities!

ROSIE. Captain Martin, Basil . . . Let me call you Basil! I am so unhappy! Won't you be kind to me?

BASIL. I can't! I'm lame.

DAVID *creeps out from the loggia.*

Hello, David! Come down.

DAVID. I will brook no commands from . . .

BASIL. Don't be an histrionic ass: come down, man! I want to talk to you.

And something in his tone makes him obey. He stands with ROSIE on the left. BASIL is in front of the altar.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

Still sulking, because I told you to go to
the devil? Did you go?

DAVID. Don't try to be funny!

BASIL. I'll be serious enough, presently. Ah, here
she is!

*DIANA rushes in determinedly from
the garden. Seeing them, she stops
dead.*

Well, Di!

DIANA. Diana!

BASIL. Di! I'm in command here.

And she is silent.

Now, we're the whole happy family to-
gether again! Nice typical example of the
blessings of Home, Sweet Home!

*Automatically, they all turn their
backs upon him.*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

You wouldn't do that, if you saw what I had in my hand.

They turn again. He has nothing.

DIANA (*laughing in spite of herself*). Silly idiot!

ROSIE sniffs. DAVID looks as if all this is in very poor taste.

BASIL. That's better! Let me see your pretty faces.

The women stiffen. DAVID imperialises.

Now, I'm here on ticklish business. I'm here offering a priceless boon. If I succeed, the boon is yours. I shall probably come off with unpleasantness anyway. In a word, I'm here to see if we can't turn this hopeless muddle into a Peace Conference.

ROSIE. I won't!

DAVID. I won't!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. I won't!

BASIL. Splendid! We're beginning properly already.

They look as if they could devour him.

DIANA. I will say just this one thing. It's what I came back for—that and my scarf. David, you are nearest. Thanks.

The transaction is made via BASIL.
ROSIE sniffs.

It's this. I'm sorry I was so—excessive, just now. I apologize for many of the things I mentioned. We needn't go into particulars, but you all know what I mean. I said things that were caddish and unladylike and horrid! (*Flaring*). And that's as far as I'll go for anybody present! Whoever she may be!

ROSIE. That's just like her! She can't even . . .

DIANA. Rosie, you ungenerous little beast, if you dare to answer back . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DAVID. Yes, that's how these polemical females, the shrieking sisterhood . . .

DIANA. You be silent! I'm not talking to you! I'll never talk to you again as long as I live!

BASIL. Am I, or am I not, the president of this Conference?

They all snap at him together;

OMNES. You—are—not!

DAVID. My mother always said that women who . . .

DIANA. Mother! How dare you profane the name?

DAVID. Profane! I'm honouring her! She made me what I am!

DIANA snorts hysterically. This gets DAVID's dander up.

Anyhow, she was no suffragette! She sprang from a long illustrious line of prolific protestant housewives!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

DIANA. Lord, can't you imagine how he's written the book!

DAVID. My mother was . . .

ROSIE. Now you've started him on his mother, he'll never never stop! I'm sick to death of his mother! I hear nothing but his mother, morning, noon and night; and I'm tired of her!

DIANA. Rosie, stop howling!

BASIL. Steady on, Diana. Don't be imperialistic! Give the little nationalities a chance!

DIANA. Well, and if we're nationalities, which is *he*? He's . . .

BASIL. Don't say it, Diana! That's carrying symbolism too far.

DIANA. Well, don't you dare to call *me* Germany! Or England! Or Russia! I won't be any of their filthy empires! I'm something crushed and hurt and hideously broken! I'm Belgium!

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL. Leopold's or Albert's?

DIANA. Well, I'm not as abominably outrageous as the one!

BASIL (*slowly*). Nor as abominably outraged as the other. Come, you be Poland; and pull yourself together.

Diana hesitates: then sinks down, and dissolves. There is a long silence.

Yes, the thought of those two agonies ought to gag all our mouths.

There is a longer silence.

And that's how it all goes. Hatred, passion, bitterness, idle recrimination, violence—everything but getting down to the root of the matter and putting it right. It isn't that the underlying causes don't go deep enough; but, my Lord, the inappropriate way of dealing with them! That's what troubles me, the inappropriateness,

the *non sequitur* of it all! Really, your little tin-pot quarrel here is very like that monster one out yonder. Landless Fritz and disinherited Bertie are now busy cutting each other's throats. In God's name, why? Because a gang of emperors and millionaires, lustng after a lump of gold in another man's land, twaddle a few obscenities about flags and fatherlands. Or motherlands, it doesn't much matter. I'm insulting all their blasted nationalities, including my own.

DIANA. I . . .

BASIL. Yes, Diana?

DIANA. Never mind. Go on.

BASIL. Of course, we are every one of us fighting for the right! So is David. So is Rosie. We are all pillaging and butchering one another, in order to maintain civilization. Yes, but which? The civilization of the Kaiser and his gentle son? The civilization of Lord Northcliffe? The civilization

THE RIB OF THE MAN

of Siberia and Bloody Sunday? Of the Turkish harem, the Serbian bomb, Italian intrigue? Or a new civilization of all the workers of the world, pledged to dispossess these . . .

You're a linguist, Diana. What's the word?

DIANA. There isn't one.

DAVID makes an angry movement.

BASIL. Yes, we know your word, David! David's word, David's book about these things, dominates the whole of Europe! Many books! White, yellow, grey, every colour! What the world is waiting for is Diana's book, Diana's Father's book, not David's! Some day, I suppose the peoples will arise and demand it, if they have to crack the chancelleries with sledge-hammers!

DAVID. Humph! Violence, now!

BASIL. Why not?—I'm a soldier! If I have hitherto shed blood for David's lie, why not, henceforward for Diana's truth?

Deeply considered, perhaps this war does present just such an alternative. What is it, but the last great struggle between woman's world, that preserves and organises and makes alive; and man's that makes destruction? There have been too many Davids managing affairs. Let's have Diana for a change.

DAVID. What about carrying symbolism too far, now?

BASIL. Don't you perceive, you pedantic ass, that I am speaking dramatically? Have you *no* imagination? Here am I, trying to uplift you from the slough of your own petty lives into a realm of pure *theoria*—That's the word, isn't it, Diana?—and you keep butting in with the trivial objections of a stockbroker.

DAVID. Nevertheless, any invasion of my God-sanctioned rights in that book or anything else, I will resist with . . .

BASIL. Oh, come off it, Billy Strutabout! We really are a little sick of you! . . .

THE RIB OF THE MAN

It's this damned impenitence of heart,
that gets me! No sense of sin anywhere!
No decent cleansing self-contempt! We
are all so blatantly assured of our election!
And we prove it by the number of dead
things we pile around us! I suppose it's
part of our disgusting religion! . . .

He pauses a little, thinking deeply.

Come to that, I'm not unscathed! I
have sinned more grievously than you all.

They look at him enquiringly.

If it were not for one thing . . .

DIANA. One thing— Yes? . . .

He fixes her with a long curious gaze.

ROSIE. What did you do, exactly?

He fixes her.

BASIL. Exactly?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

ROSIE. Yes.

BASIL. Murder.

ROSIE. Murder! . . .

BASIL. Cold-blooded murder, too: that's the worst of it! No excuse in passion, for the deeds I did! I have slaughtered cynically, laughing like a sportsman, counting my bag. You, David, have falsified a great scholastic trust. I have destroyed past recovery, the garnered learning of the ages. *You* have repudiated prospective motherhood. I have massacred sleeping babies.

ROSIE. Murder! . . .

DAVID. He means militarism. That's this new-fangled pacifist way of talking.

BASIL. Yes, the new way! You see, war doesn't look as beautiful to soldiers as it does to patriots. I say this, who have served it with the devotion of an anchorite. Yes,

David's book tricked me: I have no cause to flout him. I have given to lies, the energy and zeal that might have saved the world. If I had only stopped to puzzle out the meaning of these words they offered me!—Honour, national destiny, your country, and the rest of it. But no! They waved a flag before me, muttering the usual incantations, and I followed. I am a soldier: I have always followed flags! I am a soldier: I have never questioned anything! I am a soldier: I have never dared to disobey! Yes, David's old-fangled gospel of the Beast with the Horns of Blasphemy bound me long enough! . . . A thousand years! . . .

But now, at last, I am free!

He pauses again, striving to remember something.

There was a word uttered the other day, a brave word, destined to become historic. It might very well be incorporated in your book, Diana. It's a woman's word, fearless, formidable; though spoken by a man.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

I should like to be associated with it now
—in the days of its contempt and obloquy.
Too proud to fight.

DAVID. And he's a soldier, mind you!

BASIL. Oh, there are many of us beginning to feel
that way. There'll be more, by and bye.
I'm telling you now, before it's popular.

ROSIE. I must say, your argument doesn't appeal
to me! It wouldn't to any real woman!
I like a man to be brave!

BASIL. Very well, we'll begin at home; and over-
turn *those* money-changers' tables!

ROSIE. I don't understand.

BASIL. *They* will! . . .

Well, Diana, have you any taunt to
fling at my cowardly head?

DIANA. It is all so new, so strange, like a dream!
You are not the Basil of those long ages
ago, before the war. How did it happen?

THE RIB OF THE MAN

BASIL. It was Something that came to me one day above the battlefield. Among the clouds. Something I saw.

DIANA. What?

BASIL. God.

They all stand perfectly still, staring at him.

I'll tell you about it, if you'd like to hear.
Won't you all sit down?

They do so: BASIL at the base of the altar: DAVID and ROSIE on the bench, left. DIANA remains where she is.

It is near sundown. The sky is now a deep burning purple, shot with gold.

BASIL tells his story very quietly, in an almost commonplace tone of voice;

BASIL. It was in the early morning. I was told off to reconnoitre. We had suffered heavily during the night; but with the dawn, the cause of Heaven was vindicated once more. We cut them into mince-meat.

I wasn't feeling very fit that morning. Insomnia, fever, all that kind of thing. As I buckled myself in, a big black cloud came sweeping overhead. *Bit of wind on,* I thought. *Perhaps blow some of these cobwebs away.* And I nodded good-bye to the boys. *So long, old hawk!* said one of them: *Mind you don't hit Christ up there!* Somehow, the word stuck in my head. As I left earth, the birds were singing.

The first few thousand feet were fairly easy. A stray shot grazed me; but I didn't consider it serious, and I pressed on. Then suddenly—I struck that cyclone! The song of it through my rigging was like jangling harps.

A look of scared remembrance comes into his eyes.

It was alive. I felt the heave and bulging of its terrible body, I drank its breath, heard the roaring of its voices. I found myself imagining—eyes! . . .

Then I got mad. I set myself to wrestle with that grim unseen antagonist, as though it were indeed some conscious soul. I suppose I grew light-headed. I began talking to him, challenging, deriding! *Come on, you devil!* *Come on, you Son of Thunder, and be pulverized!* Then, with a shift of fancy, came to me that scriptural name for God: *to Pneuma Hagion*—the Holy Wind! It tickled me immensely. The quip, the irony of it! And the cloud swooped down upon me.

You people don't know what it is to be lost in a cloud. The dark, the desolation! It's like disembodiment—in purgatory. You lose all bearings. Above, below, the usual distinctions don't mean anything. It's only when the things begin to fly *up* out of your pockets. . . . And not always then. There's that rush of blood to your

head! There's madness, delirium! . . . It seemed ages. Presently, a miracle happened, a flood of light! It was the cloud whisking away. And I saw the world upside down!

That's funny, I said: I always thought the sky went that way! Suppose it's all right! That's how it must look to God!—Everything turned about! The paradoxes, the time-worn antinemies floated dimly through me. Damned idiotic arrangement! I muttered, and grew hideously calm.

He continues as in a dream. He seems almost to have forgotten their presence.

Then bit by bit, slowly, I became aware that I was not alone. He had circled around me several times, before I realized. I saw his flag first. It was the enemy's! . . . I gazed at it stupidly, trying to collect myself. At last, I said: *Why, that's my enemy! There's the gutless dog that is destroying civilization!* And I emptied both

THE RIB OF THE MAN

my barrels into him. Then I grinned inanely, and looked into his face. It was the face of Christ! . . .

When I woke, I was in the hospital. It was Maytime. Through the open window came a puff of wind, bearing a scent of blossoms. And the birds were still singing.

After a few moments, he rises and says quietly;

Now, do you understand?

The others rise also.

DAVID. Only too well. If I divine you rightly, you forsake your vows as a soldier, your honour as a gentleman, your king, your flag, your country.

BASIL. You divine me perfectly. I spit out of my mouth, the service of Caiaphas and Pilate forever! I am the man without a country! I have “accepted” Jesus.

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He emphasises the cant word, bringing out both ironies.

DAVID. Do you believe in peace at any price?

BASIL. Well, at the price of everything that *you* call honour.

ROSIE. I'm with David, absolutely! I despise disloyalty! Oh, how I despise it!

BASIL. And you, Diana?

DIANA. I'm with you, Basil. I despise it, also.

BASIL. Then, out of the way, you mountebanks and puppets of a dead and dying order! Clear the stage, for the biggest love-scene that was ever played on earth!

DIANA. Love-scene! What do you mean?

BASIL. Between the New Woman, already in the world; and the New Warrior coming to her, as quickly as the devil and the European War will let him! I'll tell you all

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about it, Diana, as soon as we get these married people bundled out.

DIANA. No! No! I am unworthy! I am unworthy!

*And she darts wildly into the garden,
like a stricken deer.*

BASIL. That's the second time she's dodged me today. If I had my plane, I'd fly to her! If I were Legge, I'd do it in a waltz! But—lame! . . . There's a symbol in that, too!

Well, Mrs. Fleming, Rosie—Let me call you Rosie!—Anything to say?

ROSIE. Nothing! Ever!

She minces disdainfully up the stairway. At the top, she turns;

I only hope you may get her!

And that is the end of ROSIE.

BASIL. You anything, David?

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DAVID (*gruffly*). No!

He turns on his heel. BASIL recalls him;

BASIL. Oh, David! . . .

Just to satisfy one last flickering nationalistic interest. What *was* your mother?

DAVID. American. Came from Milwaukee.

And he follows ROSIE proudly. It is like the passing of an emperor.

It is sundown. The night is falling fast. ION enters with a lighted lantern, which he places on the altar.

BASIL. Ion! Where is she?

ION. Under the fig-tree. Weeping.

And without another word, BASIL limps off.

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ION looks around, to make sure the coast is clear. Then he whistles softly towards the cellar. PROUT emerges with his paraphernalia.

ION. Did you find your worm?

PROUT. I have been strangely misled. This is no problem in polyandry at all. I find nothing more unusual in this ménage than paranoia, polymorphous perverse, introversion and dementia præcox. With two exceptions. The young man, Legge, I regard as a healthy, wholesome specimen of everything modern eugenical science might desire; and the suffrage woman is a fine example of an Œdipus Complex, stimulated by the demise of her late lamented archæological Papa!

I won't stay dinner. I will go and communicate my discoveries to my friends in Zürich and Vienna.

He moves towards the villa, and stops.

No! Matrimony! Ugh! . . .

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He moves towards the garden, and stops.

Love! Ugh! . . . Ah!

And he chooses LEGGE's way of the wall. He is already half-way over.

ION. Take care!

PROUT. Why?

ION. It is a steep place, running down into the sea.

PROUT. Too late: I'm over!

And he is. A moment later, DIANA and BASIL come panting in from the garden. DIANA takes the left of the altar, and faces BASIL, who is on the right. The lantern illuminates them.

BASIL. Diana! Diana!

DIANA. No! No!

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A gun is heard from below.

What's that? . . .

ION. Only the Harbour-Master, telling: *All is well!*

He leaves them.

If required, the CURTAIN may descend at this point.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT

THE FIFTH ACT

THE WAY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: DIANA and BASIL stand, one on each side of the Altar of the Mother of the Gods: DIANA, left; BASIL, right. The night has fallen; but ION's lantern is there. And the moon is rising.

BASIL.. Diana, listen to me!

DIANA. I daren't! I daren't!

BASIL. Oh, Diana, you are wrecking me at the very moment of my freedom! Don't be selfish! Think of me! Remember that glorious outburst of passionate eloquence I poured into your ears down yonder! Speeches, a playwright might have envied! And none but nightingales to hear me! Oh, these love-scenes that nobody ever witnessed! Think of the greatness of the thing I offer you, Diana! I'm not offering mat-

rimony. I'm not insulting you! This is love! I'm simply asking you to live with me!

DIANA. Yes, I think I understand! Live with you!

BASIL. With you, near you, by you—anything: so long as I am within sight of your beautiful face, the sound of your adorable voice!—Oh, your voice! It isn't like a voice at all! It is like the memory of all the dreams and immortal longings of the ages! I want you for my friend, my comrade! As for matrimony, that evil protestant stew of smugness and bestiality, I abjure it! The Blessed Sacrament of Marriage, if you will! Some day! When I am worthy! When I have cleansed myself of—sex! When I am above it, beyond it, like the holy angels of God! But meanwhile, friend, comrade, fellow-worker in the fashioning of a new world! Diana, don't you know, that it is what the age is waking to? Can't you feel that all the winds of Heaven are driving us to this?

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DIANA. Yes, yes, I feel that too! I know we are on the threshold of the Great Miracle! A New World, so far as the relation between man and woman is concerned. A world of less sex and more love. There shall be real children in that world! Children with wings maybe: children of the open sky: maybe at last some Golden Child, quickened of the Wind Himself! Yes, yes, I see the beauty of it; and yet . . .

BASIL. You mean, perhaps, the blind sniggering multitude. . . . People like Rosie, like Legge . . .

DIANA. No, I'm not thinking of what people might say! It's myself!

BASIL. Yourself? . . .

DIANA. Oh, how I have dreamed of this day! I have waited for it, all women have waited for it, down the centuries! I too, have heard the voices, seen the sign in the skies, have known the rushing of that Mighty Wind. . . . And yet, now that the Day is here, I am afraid!

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BASIL. Afraid! Of what?

DIANA. The Thing before us! The Thing already standing at the door.

BASIL. If you fear that perhaps again, after *this* war. . . . But no! This is the war that ends war.

DIANA. War end war! If we depend upon war to end war, we are lost indeed! Already, the nations that began with that doctrine are singing *their* hymns of hate, planning trade reprisals, further armaments in the future. No! War, under all circumstances is abominable, blasphemous and obscene! It drags everything, everybody, into its pestilential vortex! It never breeds anything but war! It is the destroyer of everything decent and human!

BASIL. That is true. And yet, in war, I have seen heroisms, that . . .

DIANA. Oh, don't mistake me! God knows, I do not wish to pluck one laurel from the sacred

brows of those poor mangled victims yonder! Rather, I will add one. They were heroes before the war—most of them. Heroes in mine, in factory, in fetid slum! The same dastardly hand tortured them in both cases. Only without publicity, the first time. Those heroisms were un-gazetted! No! War will end by the advent of Something mightier than itself! It is here, now! At the door!

BASIL. What?

DIANA. The Day! The coming of the Lord in clouds of glory! The millennium!

BASIL (*under his breath*). Diana! . . .

DIANA. It may be already, the trumpets have sounded, for those that can hear: for those that can see, already the graves opened and given up their dead! One watches people's faces. . . . There is a strange light! One listens to the unsaid whisperings of their spirits. . . . It is a kind of Wind! And everywhere! Like a rustling among

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the leaves! A breathing out of the heart
of the forest! . . .

That is why I am afraid! I ask myself,
am I ready?

BASIL. That is a terrible thought, Diana.

DIANA. It is a terrible moment in the history of
the world.

BASIL. Am I ready? I ask myself that question,
too.

DIANA. That preparedness is worth considering,
isn't it, Basil? It goes deeper than their
hell-fire, too! It's a little more important
than saving your own soul!

BASIL. Yes, but you'd never get religious people
to see that!

DIANA. Nevertheless, despite *their* infidelity, when
He comes, He must find faith on the earth.

BASIL. It calls for a New Man!

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DIANA. It calls for a New Woman!

BASIL. Not Superman! It must be Man of God's own making! Not man whose line goes back through ancient lusts and tyrannies to the ravening beast!

DIANA. Not Superwoman! But Woman, God's Helpmeet, whose line goes back through pangs and crucifixions, bearing the life and rapture of the coming day!

BASIL. Where shall we look for them?

DIANA. Perhaps we shall find them here. Among the Common People. Once they are set free.

BASIL. They must free themselves.

DIANA. Yes, we must free ourselves! And each other! We must free ourselves of all lies! Of the beast within, and of the beast without! We must free ourselves of the despotsms, the nationalities, even the flags! We must free ourselves of everything, however reverend, that makes a lie!

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BASIL. And then? In this broken world? . . .

DIANA. Forgive one another! And bring forth anew!

BASIL. Have you any definite plans, Diana?

DIANA. No! They are in the hands of God. He will reveal them. We must follow the light.

Are you ready, Basil?

BASIL. I am ready.

DIANA. Then—friend, comrade, beloved!

They join hands above the altar.

BASIL. Diana!

DIANA mounts to the altar, and stands there like a priestess at the moment of some high sacrament. BASIL looks at her: then sinks quietly to the base at her feet.

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DIANA. There is something more beautiful than passion, Basil. There is bliss. Out of bliss come forth the deathless children of the spirit. It is the only secret of creation. The secret of Great Art, of Social Order, of a New World! Out of bliss, the Master Craftsman of the Universe makes all things. He, who knows the last word, ere He writes the first. He sees the action one, complete and of a certain magnitude. With an inner and an outer meaning, symbolical, instinct with paradox and irony leading deeply unto truth. Inspiring! Uplifting! Illuminating! And with cleansing in the end!

BASIL. Such bliss be ours. *It is ours!*

DIANA. Why then, our Golden Child is here! That gladness also goes to the making of this moment! It gives the assurance of the future in the present! And not only so! Of the past also! It makes all one! No longer will I mourn the dead! Those stricken brothers yonder! Rather will I sing and rejoice! Why, even now. . . .

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Any moment, any moment—in the twinkling of an eye. . . . Because I veritably believe. . . .

BASIL. Believe—what, Diana?

She looks at him curiously; and then, slowly, emphasising every point, says;

DIANA. Because I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of *Life!* Who *spake* by the prophets! Because I believe in the *forgiveness* of sins! The *resurrection* of the body! And the *Life everlasting!* Amen!

The moonlight is upon them. There is heard the sound of nightingales in the garden; and a faint stirring of wind.

The CURTAIN descends.

END OF THE PLAY

